

Chronicles of
the namtok phaeng forest park



phrakhru suphatthamaphirom
(maha withun thamawaro)



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The Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park

By

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(Maha Withun Thamawaro)

U

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Translator's Note

The translators have attempted to adhere to the original document as closely as possible. Names of people, locations, plants and animals in the text have been transliterated. For plants and animals, scientific names and/or common names are provided in parentheses. A short vocabulary list of selected Thai words and phrases appearing in the text has been appended.

G. Lamar Robert
Chongchit Sripun Robert

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Preface

The Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park began as a degraded forest area where individuals in the past had staked claims to the land and repeatedly destroyed the forest to clear land for agricultural production. They grew rice and vegetables for a time, then abandon the area. Just as the forest started to recover, it would be destroyed again. This cycle continued on until I issued an announcement that the forest should be reserved as a recreation area for Ko Pha-ngan, the "Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park."

Note: At the time this English translation was being prepared for publication, Phra Khru Suphathra-thamaphirom received word that the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park would soon be gazetted as the Ko Pha-ngan – Than Sadet National Park.

Tin ore, a natural resource, is widely found in the soil, gravel and sand along all the small streams which merge with the "Than Nam Rak." This ore enticed people to go there to pan for the mineral. Your author used to pan for tin to earn money. Later, the ore became more difficult to find.

When tin ore was plentiful, there were people in abundance; when there was little tin, there were few people. Today, you don't find anyone panning for tin. That is normal. No matter where, when resources are depleted, the people also go away. People treat each other the same way: when someone's resources are depleted, often their friends depart as well.

Along both banks of the stream trees of various sizes and many varieties used to spread their branches, shading the waterway. Then all the valuable trees were cut down and made into different objects to fill customers' orders. There used to be fruit trees such as *mapring* (*Bouea microphylla*), *di ngu* (*Picrasma javanica*), *ya yai* or *khi kwang* (jambolan - *Eugenia cumini*), *mai lon* (*Elaeocarpus floribundus*), *laekhaeb* (a medium size tree), *wa* (*Garcinia hombroniana*), mangos, *kawalad pheun muang* (a chestnut) and many others bearing different kinds of fruit. For those of particular economic value to the villagers such as chestnuts, someone would gather up most of the fruit and sell it in the market. During the fruiting season, various forest animals such as monkeys, langurs, squirrels, common tree shrews, wild pigs, etc., would excitedly rush to eat the fruit. Monkeys and langurs came to eat in groups of ten or more. In the past, they were not afraid of humans but then people started hunting the monkeys and langurs almost every day. As a result, they fled deeper into the forest. Even when they were rarely seen, people still hunted them. Birds and wild pigs were also hunted including hornbills (I believe hornbills are now extirpated on Pha-ngan). In earlier times, no one dared to harm the Sambar deer, five of which King Rama V had presented to Ko Pha-ngan, even when they grazed in villagers'

gardens unless an animal had previously harmed a human. They foraged freely, even wandering into the deep jungle. Over time, they multiplied in the mountain forests, coming out to browse on farmers' vegetables and grain crops. Farmers killed some. Other people waited for an opportunity to surreptitiously shoot them. Over time, the number of hunters increased to the point that the deer have been nearly extirpated on the island.

If even deer donated by the King can be destroyed, what ordinary forest animals will be able to survive?

All forested areas which were suitable for agricultural production were destroyed; no consideration was given for the trees being razed. The impacted area covered hundreds of rai [1 rai = 1,600 square meters], a very significant loss to the nation's forest resources. That deforestation activity resulted in the destruction of streams, the loss of habitat for forest animals and other things connected with the forest. The destruction was carried out solely to allow the land to be used temporarily for production of rice and other crops.

That deed is equivalent to burning a million baht to obtain a one baht coin.

Your author saw the tragic loss of natural resources. It engendered in me various feelings and ideas, but I was not able to share them with others. I had to just keep my feelings in my heart.

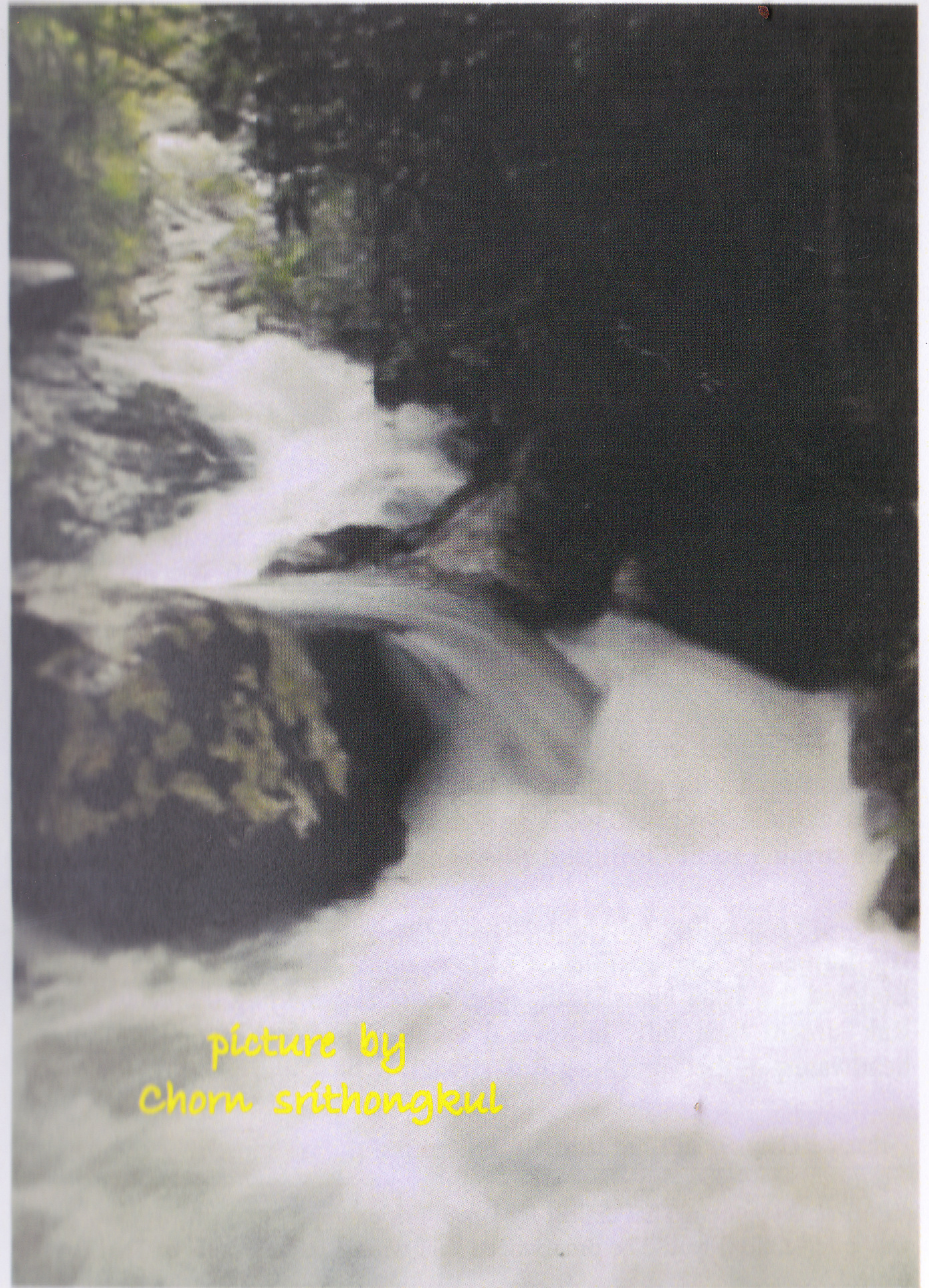
Everyone has the right to dream, but you must be careful not to act on all your dreams.

On 15 January 1949, your author made notes while sitting alone beside a pool along a stream. The ideas I could not express out loud I decided to articulate by writing the words "Than Nam Rak" on a stone cliff above the pool near the waterfall. I stared for a while at the black letters I had written with charcoal and my old feelings and dreams reemerged. I made a resolution that "If the forest around this

stream has not yet been destroyed, if no one has obtained rights to the land and if an opportunity presents itself, I must establish this area as a 'forest park'."

Not many days after that, I took a small hammer and chisel with me and carved those words into the rock deeply enough that they could not be easily obliterated. Because they have seen my epigraphy, young children now call that pond "Wang Nam Rak."

My vision, before I began taking action to make it real, was merely a dream I quietly kept to myself, waiting for the opportunity to begin overt action. Success is waiting to reward those who persevere.



picture by
Chorn srithongkul

Thinking about the past

On 16 July 1967 your author had an opportunity to return to the "Wang Nam Rak" pond and look at the words I had inscribed on a rock beside the waterfall cliff. I thought about my life in the past.

Nineteen years had passed and your author still could not see any way to establish the forest park. There was only the idea of trying to find a way to begin to make my dream a reality.

When you try to find a solution, one day opportunity may reward your perseverance.

Once while I was thinking about the past, the monks Phra Maha Prakij, Phra Thonglo, Phra Prasit, Novice Wisuth, Novice Phinij and Novice Chomphol on returning from the northern part of the Than Nam Rak sat down on a rock outcrop near your author. Maha Prakij related what they had seen. "Than Maha, there is a beautiful waterfall a short distance from here which has many levels. From the highest level you can see coconut groves, fishing boats floating on the ocean and the Ang Thong archipelago. Dimly in the distance, as if through a gauze curtain, you can see a very beautiful mountain range. It's a truly striking scene."

Your author told him, "That's the Nam Tok Phraek¹ waterfall. It's formed by the confluence of two small streams, the Than Nam Lod and the Than Nam Duan. The water flows along the Than Nam Rak stream then falls in several levels. They're branches of the headwaters of the Than Nam Rak stream."

¹ *Phraek* is southern Thai dialect for *yaek*. For example, *sam yaek* [three-way intersection] would be pronounced *sam phreak* in the Southern Thai dialect.

Phra Maha Prakij then said, "Oh, that's a beautiful name."

Then Phra Thonglo asked, "Phi Maha, what's the name of the waterfall?"

"It's called the So Pha waterfall," your author replied, "because the falling water has gradually eroded the stone, forming channels in the rock. Did you see it? In some places the channels have formed deep hollows."

"What's the name of that waterfall over there?," asked Phra Thonglo, pointing.

"That's the Jon Khan Bandai [jumping down stair steps] waterfall."

"It is surely well named. It's as if nature intended to create stairs steps. The water falls down in many levels. It's truly beautiful," praised Phra Thonglo, expressing his feelings. Phra Mahaprakit extended an invitation, saying,

"Than Maha, let's go back down and look at the area around Phaeng. We can take a look at the Nam Tok Phaeng Noi. Because it's just rained, it's full of water and really beautiful."

Then he added, "I understand Khun Thonglo comes from a different province. I want him to have a look at the Nam Tok Phaeng Noi waterfall. When he returns home, he'll be able to tell his parishioners about it."

"All right, that sounds good to me. Let's go. Is it far?"

"No, it's not far. It's near this stream, but the waterfall itself is fed by another small stream which joins with this one," explained Phra Maha Prakij.

Your author and the other monks and novices in the group were ready to go, so I said good-bye to "Wang Nam Rak" and went on to see the Nam Tok Phaeng Noi waterfall.

"Phi Maha, is this the Nam Tok Phaeng Noi waterfall?," Phra Thonglo asked.

"That's right," Phra Maha Prakij responded.

"Oh, ho! That's really beautiful. And the waterfall is very high, too."

"It sure is. It's about 25 meters high," Phra Maha Prakij said.

"That would be my estimate, too," Phra Thonglo said, then he shared a thought with your author saying, "all waterfalls and ponds should have names like this one. We can know where we are along a stream when we have a name for the location. If possible, signs should be erected giving the names of the sites so visitors can know where they are without having to ask someone."

"I feel the same as you do, but I'm stumped about how to find the funding and people who are willing to volunteer their time to help with the activity. People like that are hard to find. That's probably one reason it's so difficult for our urban and rural areas to prosper."

"That's usually the case. Whoever gets there first grabs all they can. They're not much interested in activities like this. Phi Maha, you live on this island; it's your home territory. You should try to find an opportunity to do what I talked about to help the general public."

Your author responded, "Yes, I've been thinking about making this place into a recreation area for the people since I was 18

years old, but I have yet to find an opportunity to do it. I can tell you about my dreams, if you like."

"I've thought about making a road to allow vehicles to reach the Nam Tok Phaeng waterfall, building a Thai-style sala, constructing a weir with a road beside it, then erecting interpretive signs giving the names of all the waterfalls and ponds. I would call the area the "Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park."

"That's a good idea. I pray that it can come true. If it can be done, it would be a crowning asset for Ko Pha-ngan."

"I've thought the same thing."

After short while, Than Maha Prakij said good-bye and departed. Phra Thonglo continued, "Ko Pha-ngan, although this is a small island, it has a lot for people to see. When I first came to Ko Pha-ngan, I noticed the unique and beautiful beach. There's a sandy point, a rocky point and a very long strip of coconut groves along the coast. There are also paddy fields, mountain forests and waterfalls. Fish are abundant in the water and animals are abundant in the forests. Even in the dry season the islanders are never short of water. The climate is neither too hot nor too cold. Rainfall is not excessively heavy; no matter how hard it rains, there is never any flooding on the island. The field crops and fruit trees give good yields; crop losses are low. There is a wide variety of food available. Ko Pha-ngan islanders live very comfortably."

"In some aspects you're right, but in other aspects it's not exactly like that. It's true that Ko Pha-ngan islanders have rice paddies, but their yields are not sufficient to feed all the residents of Ko Pha-ngan. They can't even feed their own families. Sometimes the islanders have come close to starving. During World War II, they were cut off from the mainland. Boats couldn't come and go at all; sometimes they were shot at by airplanes, sometimes bothered by

submarines. People didn't have enough rice to eat. Some subsisted on young coconut meat mixed with taro and sweet potato. I experienced that period myself, and it still frightens me. There's also the monsoon season which can inflict damage unpredictably. You never know when a big storm is going to hit. When it does, the islanders are immediately frightened because the boats will not be able to deliver rice. Commodities will quickly become scarce and prices will rise rapidly."

"But I still think that the coast gives the Ko Pa-ngan islanders some advantages over mainlanders. The orchard farmers on the island are better off than the paddy rice farmers in my home village in Pitsanuloke Province."

"In what way do the islanders have an advantage?"

"They have an advantage in many areas. One example is income. The farmers here earn money from the coconuts and fruit trees in their orchards, making tens of thousands of baht per year. They also have vegetables, shrimp, fish and shrimp paste. Most of the islanders can get those things by themselves without having to pay even one penny. And they also have the opportunity to dig ore, to pan for minerals, to cut timber and to make charcoal for sale. It all adds to their income. On the other hand, mainland paddy rice farmers get income only from their rice crop. If they are unlucky in terms of rainfall and weather, they have nothing else to fall back on. Shrimp, fish, crabs and shellfish are hard to find. It's difficult to plant vegetables because of the lack of water. I say that the Ko Pha-ngan islanders have a big advantage over rice farmers on the mainland."

"Khun Thonglo, what you've seen of the Ko Pha-ngan islanders makes you think they have a good income and few expenses because they can gather their own food. That's an illusion. In fact, most of the islanders prefer to buy their food rather than gather it. Few people enjoy going to gather seafood, but many enjoy buying it."

It's true that shrimp, crab, fish and shellfish are abundant, but people here enjoy their comfort. Who would want to make life more difficult for themselves? Almost all the vegetables you see for sale in the market here come from somewhere else. Some people have a lot of unimproved land, but they leave it idle. They don't do anything useful with it. The vegetables that should be grown here are not."

"Is it that right? There's surely plenty of shrimp, crabs, fish and shellfish, both salt water and fresh water types. Just look." Phra Thonglo pointed for your author to see the fish in the water nearby where we were sitting. "Those fish, if this was my home village there's no way they would still be there for people to look at. The youngsters would have cast their nets and caught them all."

"You mean those little fish?"

"Yes, those fish there. People in my village like that kind of fish very much. Salt them and fry them up crispy. That's tasty. Make them into *kaeng som* style curry and they taste really great."

"Those small *pla sew* (glass fish - *Parachela oxygastroides*), nobody here is interested in them. In the streams here when I was a child people often came to catch *pla duk* (walking catfish), *pla chon* (snakehead murrel), *pla nua on* (butter catfish), *pla kha-yaeng* (striped dwarf catfish), *kung khulon* (small translucent shrimp) and *kung luang* (giant freshwater prawns). At night I would shine a light to catch frogs. It sure was fun back then. Now, the people use poison to catch fish. The aquatic animals are almost gone, so you don't see children catching fish anymore. Before, especially in the dry season like this, the place would be full of children catching fish and shrimp."

"Oh, you mean there are walking catfish and snakehead murrel in these streams?"

"There used to be. I'm afraid they're all gone now."

"That makes me even more convinced that diligent Ko Pha-ngan islanders have an easier life than the paddy rice farmers in my home village on the mainland."

"I think that whether islander or mainlander, if people are diligent and know how to find the land and water resources and how to use them, if they know how to save and how to spend money wisely, and if they don't gamble, they should all be secure."

"Yes, I think that's true. In any event, you are back at Ko Pha-ngan now so you should surely be able to find a way to build that forest park you've been dreaming about. I think that if I ever get an opportunity to visit you again I'll surely be able to see your dream forest park."

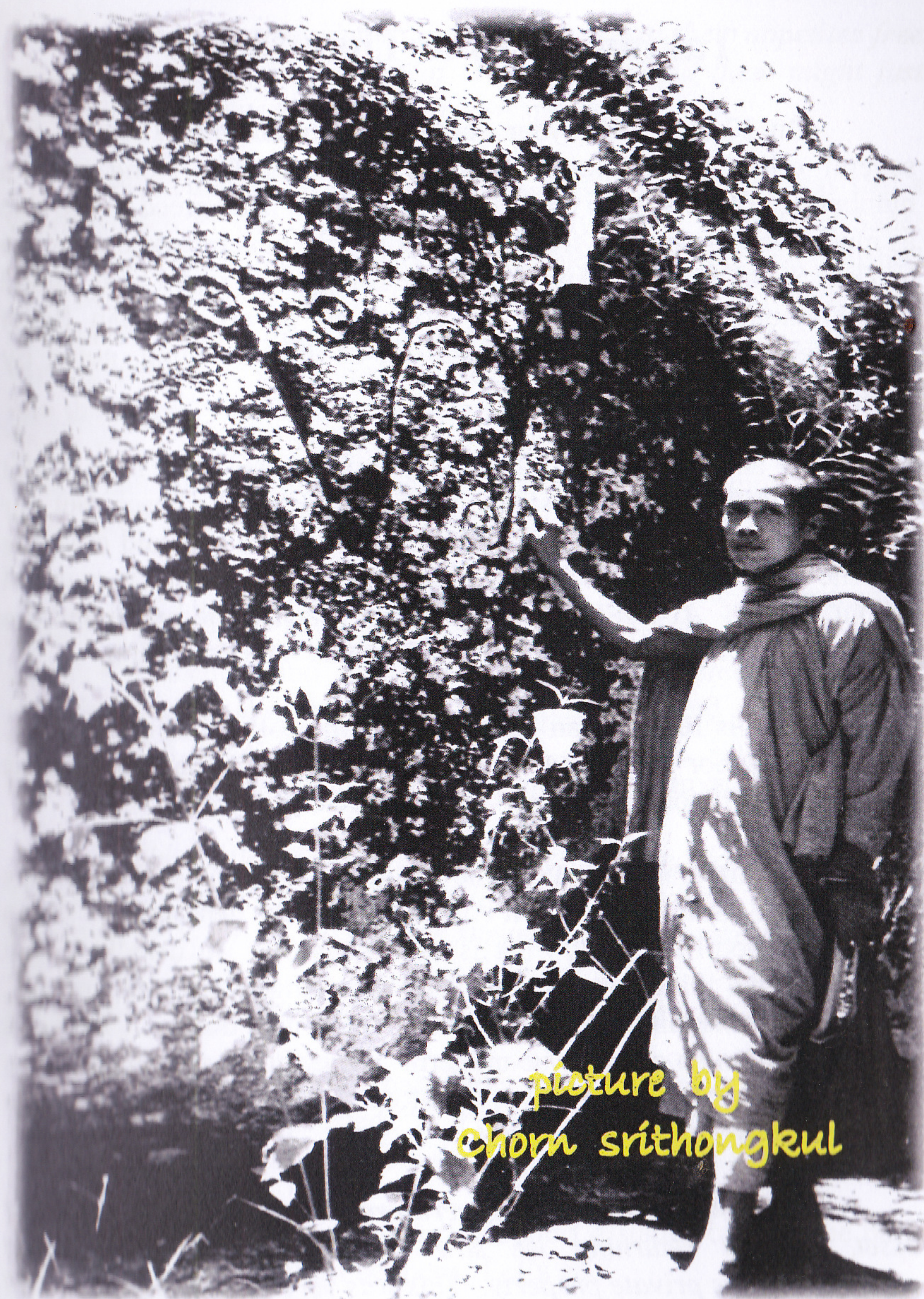
"I'll keep looking for any opportunity that will help me achieve my goal. I made up my mind long ago to do this. I think you will have a chance to see the forest park I've been dreaming about – if you come back to visit me again in about 60 years."

"I meant it; I'm not just talking."

"I know you do mean it. But now it's time to go back because it will be dark soon. Walking in the dark is difficult."

We walked quickly away from Than Nam Rak and went back to Wat Rasadara Charoen in Tambon Ko Pha-ngan², Ko Samui District, Suratthani Province where your author was the acting head abbot of the temple at the invitation of Than Ajan Chao Khun Wisuthisophon.

² Presently Ko Pha-ngan District.



picture by
Chorn srithongkul

Taking a trip to Than Sadet

On 17 July 1966 your author along with Phra Thonglo and several other monk friends from different temples along with a number of villagers, both male and female (who had agreed to provide as much food, desert and fruit as they could for us) embarked on a trip to Than Sadet by boat. Your author had arranged to rent a boat named "Sriphinthong" for the trip. If you want to go to Than Sadet comfortably and without spending a lot of time traveling, going by boat is the best option.

At about 10 AM the "Sriphinthong" sailed into Than Sadet Bay. The water in the bay is deep all the way up to the beach, but our boat had to slow down as we approached the shore to avoid crashing into the anchored fishing boats waiting for nighttime so the men could go out fishing. At last the "Sriphinthong" reached the beach and the passengers jumped onto the land – Than Sadet, our destination.

"Is this really Than Sadet?" someone called out uncertainly. Even your author felt strange seeing so many things that were not as they had been before. The place was completely changed.

It is natural that over time locations, customs and traditions will change. Some things don't interest the new generation. Some things are modified. But what is saddest is that we usually throw away our own things, replacing them with things from other places, without understanding the real meaning of the new things. Change is adopted only in an effort to be modern. Some things are current for a period of time then go out of fashion. Later they may become fashionable again; it is like a cycle.

Than Sadet Bay was a government reserved area, a national asset, but on returning we saw it had been destroyed and appropriated as private property. This was very distressing, very sad

for the nation. People who allow their greed and their appetites free reign and who are not aware of the world around them might just destroy everything, including their own species.

From about 1942 to 1949-1950, when your author was still a young student, I visited "Than Sadet" many times. The Than Sadet beach was made of ocean-washed gravel bleached white and polished to a nearly uniform size. There was no trash and no man-made structures. Forest trees of all sizes rimmed the sandy beach, their varying shades of green melding harmoniously. When you walked into the forest, you felt comfortably cool under the shade of the trees. There was a gentle breeze coming off the ocean and a gentle mist from Than Sadet falling lightly on your skin. Imagine how that impressed visitors to Than Sadet right from their first encounter.

Now the Than Sadet beach was littered with permanent houses and stores. There were itinerant sellers' shacks laid out in disorderly fashion and noisome smells. The forest which had provided comfortably cool shade had been destroyed and converted into coconut plantations controlled by someone who considered himself the owner of the land. It made me think to myself,

"This national reserved forest was designated by Phra Piya Maharaja (King Rama V) and includes Than Sadet it encompassed an area of 574 rai. Now it has shrunk and disappeared, becoming the personal property of a few individuals. How could the people assigned to look after the area allow it get into this condition?"

"Phi Maha, is the Than Sadet stream very far?" asked Phra Thonglo who then suggested, "If it's not too far, let's go there. This place is not very suitable – there are too many people all around."

"It's not very far. Just walk a short distance beyond the back of that the store and you'll be there. Let's go."

After telling the others of the plan, your author led the group of monks past the throngs of people, past the stores and through the reserved forest toward the Than Sadet stream. Before arriving at the stream, the group turned right onto a small trail to try to get to a big *sai* tree (banyan - *Ficus bengalensis*). That was the spot King Rama V and his successors had visited. Following in the footsteps of His Majesty King Rama V, subsequent Thai monarchs have carved their initials on a large stone under the banyan tree as a memorial of their trip to the Than Sadet stream.

This is a historical site and should be treated with respect. It is an auspicious place invested with special power and cherished by the residents of Ko Pha-ngan. The site is still regarded as special and the people still venerate it and treat it with respect. They don't allow people's greed to intrude. The people cooperate to protect and maintain that which they respect and love so it will continue to exist in the future.

Your author felt that the people living near the banyan tree should help look after the cleanliness of the area. Not that they should sweep the area clean to the point where only bare sand was left, but rather that they should help prevent the trees from being cut down and should refrain from tethering their livestock there. They should not be inconsiderate and do their bathroom business where visitors would see it. If people would do only that much, it would be enough for the people visiting Than Sadet. As soon as your author arrived at the site, I had to hold my nose and hurry away from the area. I was afraid I would vomit. I could have fainted right there.

"Khun Thonglo, come look at this. Do you know what magic sign this is?" Your author called to Phra Thonglo to come look at the magic sign carved on a stone by the bank of the stream near the trail.

"Oh, what magic sign is that? It's a *tao ruenyai* sign, I think. I'm not sure. I'm not very much interested in magic signs, formulas and incantations."

"I don't know much about such things either. Let's go rinse off in the water. After we have had our meal, we can go look at the stream some more."

"OK. That's a good idea. Let's go take a bath and cool off. It's so hot and sticky because of the salt and the mist."

After that, your author led the way to a site which is considered important because it has the initials of His Majesty King Bhumipol (King Rama IX) as well as those of the Queen made during their visit to Than Sadet. Than Sadet is divided into three areas. Each of those areas has the initials *jo po ro*³ written clearly on the rock cliff. Each area has its own special beauty, distinct from the others. This is a stream that should be preserved in its natural state; it is a memorial to His Majesty King Rama V.

Our group of monks and novices plus some of the parishioners who had come along to provide for the monks bathed in a pool fed by a small waterfall. The waterfall was beautiful and not at all dangerous. After bathing, we sat together under the shade of a tree near the pool to wait for the parishioners to bring food as had been arranged. Soon the parishioners came walking in from various directions carrying the food or balancing it on their heads. Some divided up the food, setting aside a portion to be offered to the monks and novices and keeping some for themselves. While they worked, some of the people hummed a song, some joked with each other and some smiled at each other.

The sound of conversation harmonizing with the sound of water falling on the rocks made me feel that "they were contented."

After the meal, we separated from the group to go look at the Than Sadet stream, visiting a sloping rock, a pond, a waterfall and the site with the initials of the kings carved in stone. Many kings had made engravings in the rock face as an auspicious act. The engravings are a valuable treasure of the residents of Ko Pha-ngan. How did the islanders of Ko Pha-ngan feel about the area? Your author didn't know, but I got some idea from the appearance of the environment I saw, enough to be able to say that there were not a few people who didn't understand the value of the area. Their feelings were demonstrated by, for example, cutting trees along the banks of streams, cutting down the forest near ponds and in watershed areas above the ponds, converting the land to agriculture and using high pressure hoses to wash away the soil to extract the tin. These activities were the cause of the pollution of the streams. Sediment and algae attached to the rocks were dangerous for visitors as they could easily slip and fall. Large, magnificent rocks were defaced with the names of boats, people and bad words which destroyed their natural beauty.

"Phi Maha, come here for a minute," Phra Thonglo called.

"Please take a picture. I want a photo of the King's initials engraved on the stone as a memento."

Your author took the picture and then the two of us walked up above the stream. I realized we had gone quite a distance; climbing up the stone cliff face and having to duck under trees and branches which had fallen into the stream was difficult, so we stopped to sit on a rock.

"Khun Thonglo, you have visited the Than Nam Rak stream. Can you compare it with the Than Sadet stream and tell me the relative merits of each?"

"Yes, I can. From what I've seen, I can make a few comparisons:

1. The Than Sadet stream is large and holds a lot of water. Most people recognize its name. Many kings have visited this stream. The Than Nam Rak stream is not very big and has less water. Most people aren't familiar with it.
2. Than Sadet lacks large trees to shade the stream because most of them have been cut down. The Than Nam Rak stream has trees of all sizes on both sides which help shade the stream.
3. Most of the water from the Than Sadet stream flows through flat channels in the rock which are wide and long but not very steep. The water from Than Nam Rak stream flows through rock channels which are narrow, long and steep so the water cascading down is more striking. In that regard, each of the locations, though different, are more or less equal.
4. Than Sadet is not very clean. There's much garbage. Than Nam Rak is cleaner with no garbage in sight.
5. People who visit Than Sadet, even if they climb up the cliff as far as this spot still can't see the panorama of the land below. At Than Nam Rak, the higher you go, the wider your vista becomes. In some places, when you go to bathe in the pond you can still see coconut groves, boats and islands. In that regard, Than Nam Rak has the advantage."

"My comparison of Than Sadet and Than Nam Rak might not be the same as someone else's as I saw the two locations at different times, but I feel the same as you do. That's why I want you to expedite finding a way to establish the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park you've dreamed about before it's too late."

"Not that again. Please don't talk about that. It's only a dream I have. I still lack the resources and many other necessary qualifications. Before closing the forest and establishing a forest park, first I have to consult with government agencies regarding whether it would be appropriate or not. I could just go ahead and do it, but then rather than doing a good deed I would be doing exactly the opposite."

"That's right. You should contact the responsible government agency right away. If they agree, you can start to work. If you fiddle around and waste time, somebody may clear the forest and convert the land to agriculture. Then they will gain control over the land just like the forest along the banks of the Than Sadet stream you saw. The beauty will be gone and there will be no way to get it back."

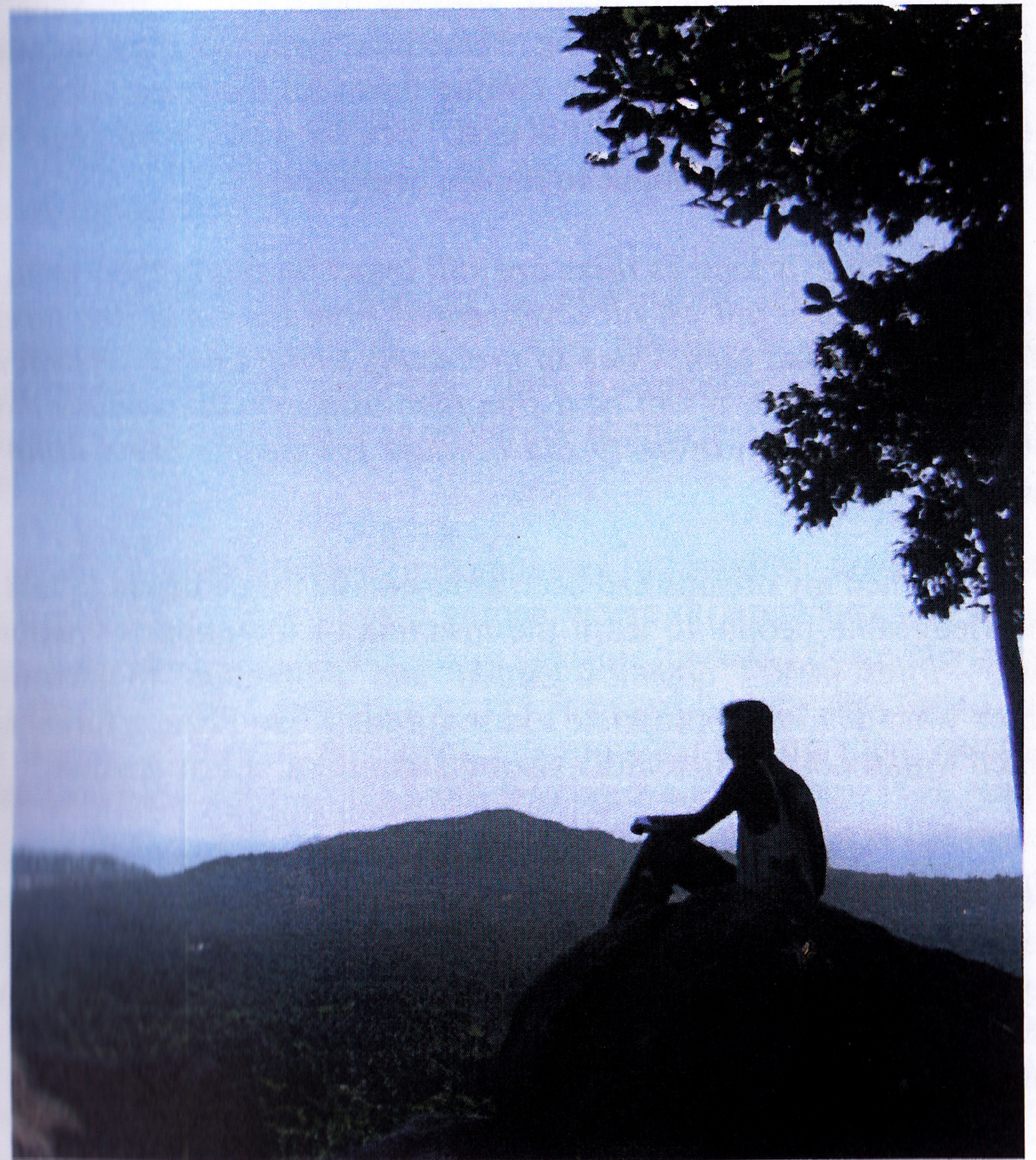
"What you've said is right on the mark. I'll pursue every possible avenue as far as my mental ability, the available resources and the authorization of the government will allow. I'll begin immediately."

"We've climbed up a long way. Let's go back now because the others will be waiting."

Your author encouraged Phra Thonglo to go back. We walked down the same path we had come up and found that the other monks, novices and parishioners had already returned to Than Sadet Bay. Some had already gotten into the boat. When your author arrived with Phra Thonglo, the rest of the group got into the boat "Sriphinthong" ready to head back to Thongsala Bay, the starting point of our trip to Than Sadet. That was also where the visitors

separated to go back to their residences. Everyone returned home safely.

Learning about the past helps you to prepare for the future. That is a law of interrelationships. Those who have knowledge of the past will better understand future changes and will thus be better able to accommodate to events or prevent them than those who do not.



The word "Park" is embedded in my heart so deeply that I even speak the word with fondness. It seemed like the remaining forest which had escaped destruction was calling me to wake up and think about the Khao Phaeng forest, the place where I dreamed of establishing the "Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park."

"Start taking action now. If you keep waiting around, the forest will be gone. When the forest is gone, there will be no forest park. There are still many people who are not aware of the value of the park; they only think about immediate gain, so they continue invading and destroying. After cutting down all the trees, they burn the stumps and take control of the land. You've seen it with your own eyes. You shouldn't continue to remain complacent."

As long as there are still intact forests in the world, as long as they have not yet all disappeared from the earth, the forests will show mankind their value in protecting living things. Whenever the forests are gone, it will be a sign that disaster will overtake those living things. It is extremely sad because few people are willing to listen.

When my dreams had been aroused like that, I began to talk to knowledgeable people to learn the meaning of the phrases "national park," "forest park," "botanical garden" and "arboretum" to determine which was the most appropriate to use for the Khao Phaeng forest and which would not conflict with existing definitions. I learned that:

1. National Park refers to a reserved protected area where the natural resources are sustainably maintained in their original state. Resources cannot be destroyed, modified or extracted, especially the trees and forest animals and includes the awesome, beautiful vistas which impress all who see them. The area must be preserved in its natural state so future generations can see it and learn about nature.

A "National Park," using the standard definition, should encompass an area of not less than ten square kilometers. Most importantly, a national park must include many interesting and beautiful natural vistas to attract the public to come and visit.

2. A Forest Park can have a beautiful location, stunning vistas, caves, waterfalls, ravines, cliffs, sandy beaches, etc. The area should be appropriately improved and maintained. It should be a place for people to rest and relax and should provide such amenities as are feasible. There should be roads and walking trails including benches and pavilions where people can rest and relax, sit and eat a meal. The location should not be too far from an urban center so travel is convenient.

3. A Botanical Garden is established to collect many different species of domestic and exotic plants. It is also a place where people can rest and relax. In a botanical garden, plants are grouped by type and family as an aid for people interested in studying them.

4. An Arboretum encompasses a smaller area than a botanical garden. It is a small garden where different types of trees are planted, especially economically valuable trees and flowering trees from the local area. The trees are not arranged by type and family as in a botanical garden, but signs are provided giving their names. There are roads and walking trails for observing the trees. The main objective is to provide a place for rest and relaxation while at the same time allowing people to learn about the different types of trees growing in the arboretum.

After evaluating the meaning of the different terms, I chose "forest park" as the people who would look after the park would be permitted to improve and manage the forest to a degree, but not to the extent that its natural state would be lost, unlike a "national park" where the forest cannot be modified. As to "botanical garden" and

“arboretum,” your author didn’t delve more deeply into them because something blocked my feelings about them. It could be because my long-standing intentions had been to develop a forest park.

I frequently thought that “people who talk to others about dreams which are difficult to bring to fruition usually elicit sarcastic remarks from their listener. The dreamer is always laughed at and made to feel embarrassed. As time goes by, one day following another in the regular order of nature, humans, although they feel the same sun, wind and rain, will have different thoughts and different dreams. They are even more varied in terms of the level of effort they extend to preserve their rights and to carry out their responsibilities. Their level of attention to detail in their lives is different. While some people only dream, other people create.

Visiting the forest – The forest was destroyed

On 7 December 1966, I thought about the forests I used to visit before such as Pha Dok Mai, Lad Mai Daeng, Yod Dome, Pa Ho Nang, Phetchaheung forest, etc. They all were fine places to visit and study for someone who loved them and who was interested in nature. If you had ever seen the blooming flowers covering the cliff at the end of May or during June you probably have fixed “Lad Mai Daeng” in your memory. When you relaxed and enjoyed a cool breeze under the shade of a *mai daeng* tree (rosewood - *Dalbergia cultrate*), whichever way you looked there was a beautiful vista. “Yod Dome” is another vantage point where you could look at the view from a high stone cliff rising from the ground. You could imagine a magician setting it leaning against a mound, with the upper part of the stone sticking up like a peak. When you climbed up and sat on the top of the stone, the surrounding shade trees blocked the sun’s rays for you. It had a view that was distinct from other areas. When you walked into the Pa Ho Nang forest or the Pa Rieo Nang Sida forest, you saw many climbing

vines of different sizes clinging to the trees both large and small. Their leaves fluttered in the breeze as if they intended to provide a show for passers-by. Many vines which had fallen from the trees were piled up on the ground around the trunks. People who wanted to take some vines home to enjoy growing them attached to trees near their house could select some pieces. At Phetchaheung forest, if you wanted to see what stalks of flowers can look like, you could visit during the months of August and September when the flower stalks emerged. People who had never seen that before were surprised. Your author has seen clumps of over 50 flowering stalks. Some flower stalks were more than two meters high, half a meter taller than a person. The flower stalks with their varying heights looked very beautiful. The things I have seen are still fresh in my memory whenever I think about Nam Tok Phaeng forest, the Khao Na Wat forest, the Tha Nui forest, the Mai Ngam forest, etc.

On a day when I was free from other work, I took the opportunity to visit again those forests I mentioned as I hadn’t been there in some time. The first place I headed was to Pha Dok Mai. When I arrived there, I was very disheartened because the forest beside the Pha Dok Mai cliff, which used to be a large wooded area interspersed with rocks of varying sizes, had been cut down. The fallen trees were piled up on the rocks and lay strewn over the ground making walking difficult. I had to make my way through newly emerging saplings which were growing above the trees which had been felled and abandoned. The area was full of ants, rocks and sharp grass. I climbed over the rocks and clambered under the remains of the fallen trees. It was hot and itchy. When I reached the face of the cliff I was disappointed again because the clumps of plants and flowering vines which used to cover the cliff face had disappeared! Only a few scattered remnants remained. There likely will be no chance to see the area again the way it was in the past. I felt sorry for the stone cliff which has lost its beautiful raiment. Nothing remained but the naked rock.

When it was time to leave Pha Dok Mai, I went on to Lad Mai Daeng. When I came close to where in the past the *mai daeng* (rosewood) trees had given me comfortable cool shade, I found they had all been cut down. Nothing was left but the stumps. Over a wide area, whichever way I looked I saw only saplings just beginning to grow so I assumed that every place I wanted to see would probably have been destroyed as well.

With bitter disappointment I left Lad Mai Daeng. In the past at the top of the dome many different types of trees had provided shade while I sat and enjoyed the view. But there was no remnant of those trees; I couldn't even see a stump. I was hot and thirsty and my throat was dry. I couldn't bear to stay around very long because everything had been so completely changed.

I left the top of the dome and walked down to a small stream so I could wash my face, clean up and get a drink to quench my thirst. Alas! The small stream, which had never run dry before, was filled with only sand because there was no longer any supporting forest watershed as before. I was thirsty. My enthusiasm was gone. I had no more energy to visit the Pa Ho Nang, the Pa Krachao Sida or the Petchaheung forests. I assumed they must have been destroyed, too. I didn't want to go there and be disappointed again, so I decided to take a shortcut through the sapling forest to Than Nam Rak and its centerpiece, the Nam Tok Phaeng waterfall. I was depending on that that stream to slake my heat-induced thirst. I was not disappointed.

When I was cooler after washing and having a drink of water I thought, "I should take action to establish a Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park. There should be no more delays. What should I do? I hadn't even surveyed the Than Nam Rak yet. I should carefully consider at all aspects before making up my mind. Was it a good idea? I was concerned because I was well aware that . . .

. . . if I did something that others didn't understand or that they didn't agree with they might be suspicious about my motives."



Deciding to establish the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park

The thirtieth of January 1967 is another important date in my life. That is the day I definitively decided to establish the "Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park." I had thought again about the idea that, "if I do things today which others do not accept it might cause people to see me in a negative light. I should not vacillate. I should not pay undue attention to others; I should just pay attention to my work. If I am

confident that I have studied the situation thoroughly and that the activity I am about to undertake will benefit the common good, I must truly devote my efforts to that activity."

When your author had prepared mentally and physically for every situation, I determined that I would establish the "Nam Tok Phaeng Waterfall Forest Park" because of the continuing destruction of the forests. When a forest is destroyed, many other things that are an integral to the forest, things which are born and live in the forest, are destroyed as well.

Your author had experienced this location at different times of the year and during different periods of my life. When I was a child and as a young man, my father, Chan Boonya, brought me to the forest to search for rattan and to saw planks of wood, some for our own use and some for sale. Sometimes we had to stay overnight in the forest to save time rather than going back and forth to home.

In the forest at that time there were big trees everywhere, covering tens of thousands of rai. The area was humid because of the cool water. Even the small streams never ran dry. The water was clean, cool and refreshing to drink. Later, the forest was cut down and burned to allow the land to be used for other purposes but those efforts were half-hearted and the land was soon abandoned. New young trees grew up, but there was no shade from larger trees to help provide cover, there was no clear water in the streams to drink.

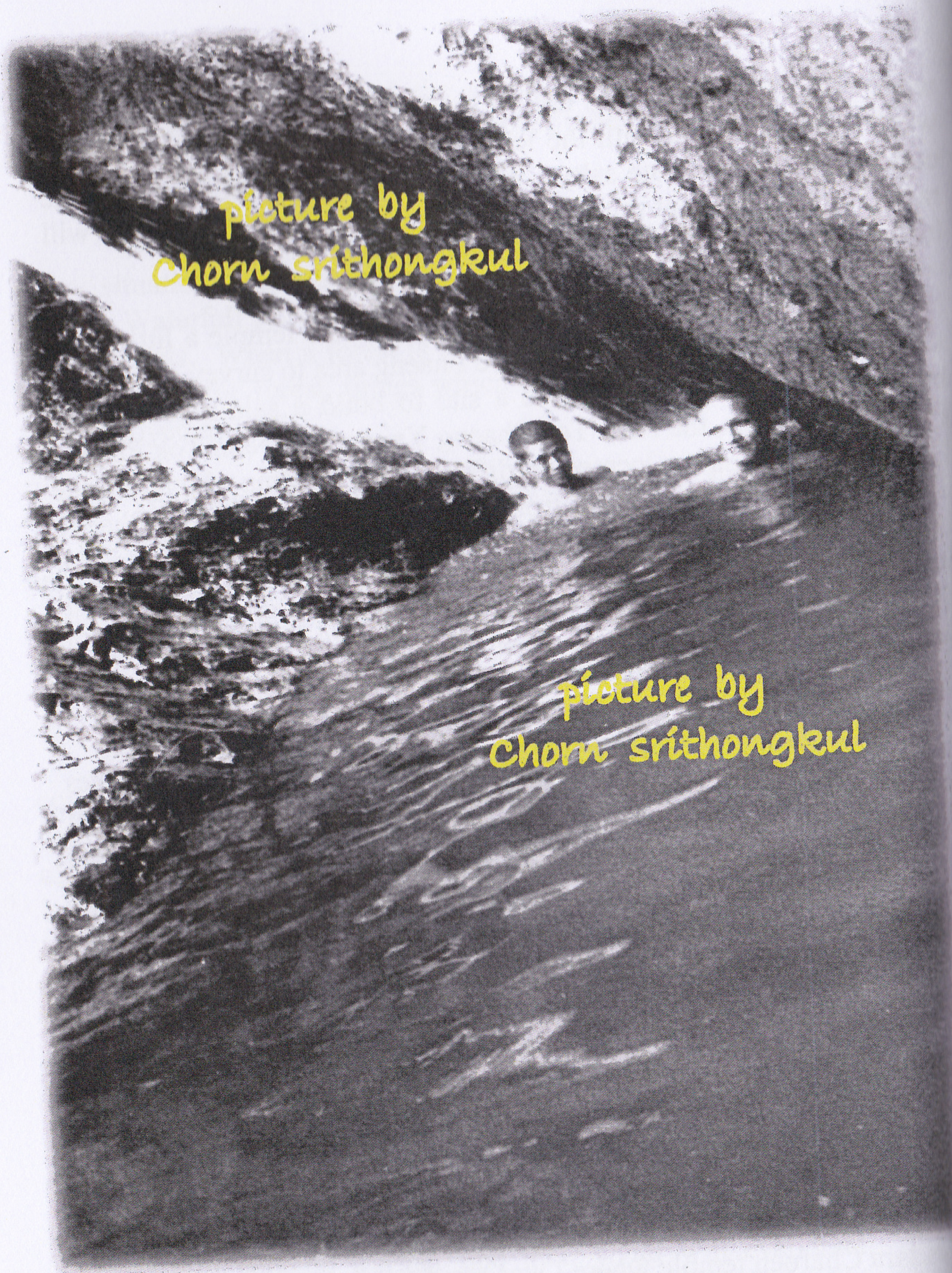
What I had seen caused me to think that, "In the future, the next generation of Pha-ngan islanders will suffer a water shortage. They won't have enough water because the forests will have been destroyed. When the forests are destroyed, the weather will get hotter cause the water in the streams to evaporate. Even underground aquifers will become warmer and their water will evaporate. The aquifers will retreat deeper and deeper because of the lack of big trees to help conserve moisture in the soil. The level of the underground

water will continue to drop until it reaches sea level. Then sea water will seep in and mix with the less abundant fresh water, making the underground water taste salty. When there is no forest, there is little rain. In years of scant rainfall, the villagers' wells near the ocean will have brackish water. This is the web of nature."

When I had made up my mind, I left the temple a little after seven in the morning and went to the Phaeng area to survey a route for building the road and to choose a site to build a sala near the two Phaeng waterfalls, the Nam Tok Phaeng Yai and the Nam Tok Phaeng Noi. The two falls are located on different two streams which join the Than Nam Rak stream not far from each other. The Nam Tok Phaeng Noi waterfall has a smaller flow of water; the Nam Tok Phaeng Yai waterfall has a larger flow. The Nam Tok Phaeng Yai waterfall is on the Than Nam Rak stream; the Nam Tok Phaeng Noi waterfall is on the Than Nam Khang Phlu stream.

When I had surveyed the area to build the sala, I set out stakes to mark the area then started off to survey a route for the road. I went back and forth between the Phaeng area and the area where villagers live. How should the road be made? How long would it be? I settled on using the method of breaking over the tops of saplings and tree branches at wide intervals to roughly mark out the alignment well enough for someone to follow.

When I had finished surveying the area for building the sala and the road, I took a bath in the Than Nam Rak stream. My heart was peaceful and contented because I had decided definitely to establish the "Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park" as I had intended. It should not be long before the Nam Tok Phaeng Waterfall forest park would emerge. It was time to walk back with confidence to the Rasadara Charoen temple where I was residing.



picture by
Chorn srithongkul

picture by
Chorn srithongkul

Than Nam Rak

Beginning the survey of Than Nam Rak

During the traditional Songkran festival and the merit-making ceremony to mark the third anniversary of the death of Phra Khru Wibulthiparat, students came to learn the results of the examination for the "Karunamaetta" scholarship. Your author had set up an educational fund for outstanding students. The students with the top grades in each class from each of the schools on Ko Pha-ngan were eligible to compete for the scholarship. Every student who took the test received an award (notebooks, pencils, rulers, erasers and pens engraved with the name "Karunamaetta") as a consolation, to encourage them and motivate them to be even more diligent in their studies during the next academic year.

Even after the completion of these activities, the heat and humidity of the hot season had not declined. That made me think about Nam Tok Phaeng again, so on 27 April 1968 I left the temple to visit Nam Tok Phaeng alone. After an hour's walk, I came to the area of the Khao Phaeng forest which is adjacent to land belonging to villagers. I sat on a rock at the edge of the water to regain my strength and used both hands to splash water on my face and body. I soaked my feet in the water and that helped banish the weariness from walking.

In the hot season there is little water in Than Nam Rak and the water table steadily declines. The water returns returning to its highest level close to the end of the rainy season, usually at the end of October or November. Some years there is a monsoon storm at the beginning of December but in April there is still enough water to cool off anyone who goes to Than Nam Rak, at least to some degree.

Your author sat and watched small shrimp come out from their crevices in the rocks and pinch my feet dangling in the water. A

small *pla sew* (glass fish) nibbled on the dead skin without fear. It could have been hunger that made it brave. The fish made me think of the plea of Lolaburusa after he had stolen food belonging to King Phrachao Phochanasuthiraja. "I am the emissary of desire. Desire makes me the servant who works for others and forces me to bring things for them. Normally all beings in the world are enthralled to desire. Desire makes them willing to travel to far away lands to get something to appease the insatiable hunger of their stomachs. I am the emissary serving the every-hungry stomach. All people are controlled by their stomachs, which are always hungry, both day and night. I am the emissary of the desires of the stomach; therefore, I am still essential. Please don't be angry with me."

The hunger in the stomach of the *pla sew* ordered it to bite my skin without fear just like Lolaburusa when the hunger in his stomach caused him to steal food from King Phrachao Phochanasuthiraja without thought of the danger. All people and animals in the world are merely slaves serving their hungry stomachs. We are all under the influence of hunger; hunger controls all people and all animals without exception. Hunger causes a lack of caution and shame. It causes people to do evil deeds and destroys their mental health.

On 27 April 1968 I thought I should start surveying Than Nam Rak, measuring the distance from the edge of the villagers' settlement to where the trail divides to go to the Nam Tok Phaeng Noi waterfall and on to the Nam Tok Phaeng Yai, the Nam Tok Khan Bandai, the Nam Tok So Pha and the Nam Tok Phreak waterfall then finally to the edge of the big forest (a virgin forest area). That day I had planned to measure only the sloping rock of the Nam Tok Phaeng waterfall and record the information.

1. I used a tape to prepare a measuring stick exactly two meters long. I brought a stone up from the stream and set it on the bank as the first kilometer marker, kilometer zero. Then I used the two-meter stick to measure the distance - 1-2-3-4-5 etc. - up to 146.5

lengths or a distance of 293 meters to the branch of the stream which flows from the Nam Tok Phaeng Noi waterfall. As to that stream, I would find an opportunity to measure and survey it after I had finished measuring Than Nam Rak. Your author measured from the branch in the stream toward the Nam Tok Phaeng Noi waterfall for another 170.5 lengths or 341 meters to the sloping rock at the base of the Nam Tok Phaeng Yai waterfall. In point of fact, the Nam Tok Phaeng Yai waterfall shouldn't even be called a waterfall because the water flows down a channel in the rock at a slope of only about 50 to 60 degrees. People who call it the Nam Tok Phaeng Yai waterfall are just following common usage.

In some instances, it is good to consider carefully before you follow others then you won't have to be worried later.

One thing you should know about the Nam Tok Phaeng Yai waterfall is that the word "Phaeng" or "Phaeng Yai" when used to refer to the waterfall means the "phaeng" or the sloping rock. Around its midpoint, the falls were 25 meters wide. The narrow portions above the waterfall and at the base of the waterfall were six meters wide. The height from where the slope began at the top of the waterfall to the level area at the bottom was 88 meters. The slope varied between 50-60 and 70 degrees. The water flowed along a channel in the rock. In the hot season you won't see much water flowing nor will you see any waterfall, but in the rainy and the cold seasons the water flow is strong. Sometimes there is so much water that you can't find a dry space on the sloping rock. That's why the villagers call it the "Nam Tok Phaeng Yai" waterfall.

The words "phaeng" or "phaeng yai" here refers to the steeply sloping stone face which is difficult or impossible to climb up, hence the name "Phaeng." That stream is larger than the other streams in this mountain range. The stream flows down and joins with a larger stream, then follows along the contour of a high, steep mountain. Finding a place to climb up that mountain from the south side of the

stream is difficult to impossible because the rock face forms a natural wall. Villagers call this mountain "Khao Phaeng." The stream at that location is called "Than Nam Phaeng." There the water flow is stronger and the waterfall there is bigger than at other locations so they call it the "Nam Tok Phaeng" waterfall and call the area near it "Nam Tok Phaeng Yai" area, not to be confused with "Nam Tok Phaeng Noi" area which is located nearby. As your author has already mentioned, I intended to find an opportunity after surveying "Than Nam Rak" to continue the surveying and measuring work at the Nam Tok Phaeng Noi waterfall.

In my explanations about "Nam Tok Phaeng Yai" waterfall, if any of you with more knowledge than I observe any errors your author might have made, I ask your forgiveness.

The first day I learned that the distance from "Than Nam Rak" measured from the edge of the villagers' coconut plantations past the Nam Tok Phaeng Yai waterfall and up to the level area was 682 meters. In addition, I learned some details about the "Nam Tok Phaeng Yai" waterfall including its width and length as well as the steepness of its slope. This is the science of geography, an area of study which is always wide open for those who want to learn. Individuals who want additional details such as information about the rocks, soil, etc., can seek that knowledge any time.

2. On 21 May 1968, about two hours after the sound of the drum announcing the daily meal had ceased, I gathered some basic necessities needed for my work, left the temple and headed for "Than Nam Rak" and the Nam Tok Phaeng waterfall to finish measuring the length of the stream that I had begun the day before.

The previous time I had stopped measuring at only 682 meters. Today I would start measuring from that point using the same measuring stick and recording each measurement - 1, 2, 3, . . . 77 - lengths to the Khan Bandai waterfall which was made of dark black

stone. That waterfall consists of five "steps" or levels, each level about 2 to 3 meters high. I measured up the waterfall from the 77 meter mark to where the ground is level, bringing the total distance to 92 meters.

Details about the Nam Tok Khan Bandai waterfall are as follows:

Height of the Nam Tok Khan Bandai waterfall	15 meters
Width of the sloping rock face of the waterfall	10 meters
Height of the waterfall steps	2-3 meters
Slope of the waterfall	about 70 degrees

The Khan Bandai waterfall was unintentionally named by your author when I was asked by Phra Thonglo, "What's that waterfall?"

When I had gained a fair amount of knowledge about that waterfall, I continued measuring up from 92 meters to 93-94 . . . 100 meters to the edge of the Wang Nam Rak pond. Then I measured from the edge of the Wang Nam Rak pond to the base of the cliff forming the "Nam Tok So Pha" waterfall (which flows down into the Wang Nam Rak pond), a distance of about 113 meters.

Details about the Wang Nam Rak pond:

Length of the pond	13 meters
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Width at the mid-point of the pond	2 meters
Width at the lower end of the pond	2 meters
Width at the upper end of the pond	1 meter
Maximum depth of the pond	1.5 meters

After I had developed a standard procedure, it was easy to continue the project I had resolved to accomplish as a young man there at the edge of the "Wang Nam Rak" pond. Although many seasons had come and gone in the 19 years since 1959, my objective was increasingly clear and impossible to forget. It was like establishing as my life's goal to work for the benefit of the general public. Doing so meant that I must sometimes travel a difficult trail. I resolved to establish the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park. If the work has not yet been completed exactly in accordance with my resolution, please don't laugh at me. Rather, please be understanding and bear witness to the fact that I will adhere to all aspects of my stated goal.

I walked away from the "Wang Than Nam Rak" pond and measured another interesting feature, the stone cliff where the water flows down into the Wang Nam Rak pond.

This waterfall is called the "Nam Tok So Pha." The waterfall cliff has the following interesting characteristics:

Approximate slope	80 degrees
Width	14 meters
Height	17 meters

From the highest point to the base of the cliff was a distance of 113 meters plus the 17 meters of the waterfall for a total of 130 meters. I continued measuring 131-132 . . . 242 meters to the "Nam

Tok Phraek" waterfall. Between those two waterfalls there are many interesting sights such as the Wang Nam Hin Klom pond (or Bo Hin pond) and the flat sloping rock which is always cooled by large and small trees. That is a good place for people who love nature to sit, to have a picnic and to rest.

Some of the normally hidden aspects of people's thoughts and feelings can be ascertained by observing their overt behavior.

That day I had done a good bit of work already so I stopped. I would continue the next day measuring the length of "Than Nam Rak" which I had worked on measuring already two times, measuring 682 meters the first time and 242 meters the second for a total of 924 meters.

3. On 17 June 1968, I had not been invited by my parishioners to participate in any religious functions where my presence was required, so I had some free time to pursue public activities.

About 1 P.M. I left the temple for Than Nam Rak to continue the measurements. The third time, your author began measuring from the 924 meter mark at "Nam Tok Phraek," extending the measurement to 1,067 meters where another stream joined the Than Nam Rak, the "Than Nam Lod" stream. When I had measured to 1,254 meters, still another stream joined Than Nam Rak, the "Than Duan" stream.

Details about "Nam Tok Phraek":

Approximate slope	50-60 degrees
Height up the face of the cliff	187 meters
Average width of the cliff	12-14 meters

Most people who see the "Nam Tok Phraek" waterfall in the rainy season when the water is full speak of it as the "Nam Tok Than Sawan" [the heavenly stream waterfall].

I began measuring at 1,111 meters and continued on to 1,188 meters. Between the 1,111 and 1,188 meter marks there were many ponds which entice people to bathe and stone outcrops which invite them to sit. At that place visitors can sit and look at the coconut plantations of the villagers of Ko Pha-ngan and at the Ko Ang Thong archipelago. When the weather is clear and the ocean is peaceful, it is possible to see additional parts of the Ang Thong archipelago.

At the 1,188 meter mark there is a long, high opening in the natural wall which allows those who are interested to get to the top of Phaeng mountain conveniently. This path also goes past Mu 2 of Tambon Ko Pha-ngan and leads on to Wat Rasadara Charoen where your author resided. The length of the natural high, steep wall made access to this mountain difficult.

Measuring the "Than Nam Rak" from the edge of the villagers' coconut plantations, your author began recording the distance to the opening which gives access to the Phaeng mountain, a total of 1,188 meters.

Whether natural formation or man-made, an obstacle cannot stop an adventurer.

After stopping to rest for a moment, I continued measuring on from the 1,188 meter mark to 1,265 meters at the edge of a large forest. (This forest had not yet been destroyed, so your author called it the "virgin forest" area). At this site there was a small stream which joined with the Than Nam Rak. This forest had many trees of significant economic value, many other natural resources and in addition was a watershed area of the "Than Nam Rak."

4. On 22 March 1969 a thought popped into my head reminding me that "letting time pass with doing any useful activity is equivalent to burdening yourself with regrets in the future." This thought motivated me to tackle the obstacles which had been blocking my creativity.

The work measuring the length of Than Nam Rak, which flows all year long, continued along the stream to the fording place which the villagers call "Tha Sataw." I continued measuring until I reached the next stream which flows steeply down at an area called Ban Khao Muang Mak, a distance of 1,343 meters. The length of the Than Nam Rak which I had already measured at 1,265 meters plus this additional 1,343 meters gave a total distance of 2,608 meters.

Completion of this survey of the Than Nam Rak provided the accurate baseline data which appears in this publication and which is part of the effort to establish the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park.

Building a road into the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park



picture by
Chorn srithongkeul

On 3 May 1972 your author was free from other obligations. After noon, I invited some monks and novices to leave Wat Rasadara Charoen with me and go to the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park to cut the new roadway. The road would begin at the Nam Tok Phaeng waterfall and continue on to the main road, a distance of one kilometer. The monks didn't have to cut trees or excavate dirt themselves because villagers who had previously made an appointment with Khun Banthoeng Chotichuang had already started

clearing the roadway, shoveling the dirt and digging out the tree stumps. By the time your author and the other monks and novices reached the Nam Tok Phaeng waterfall, Khun Banthoeng had already cut down the trees along the marked route, dug up the tree stumps and cleared the other vegetation. The plan was to construct a sala at the point where the road began. After Khun Banthoeng dug up the stumps, cleared the vegetation and excavated the dirt, the monks and novices leveled an area large enough to build the sala.

The next day a monk known as Luang uncle Chob who lived at Wat Srithanoo along with the son of Khun Chakrathip Reuangroj, the headman of Mu 8, brought other villagers to help continue the road building from where work had left off the day before. At that point, a wide area was prepared to make it convenient for parking cars and turning vehicles around to make certain that "all types of vehicles will be able to get here." Most people felt, however, that there would be only pedestrians walking along the road; they thought it would be too difficult for motor vehicles. Who would dare to drive their vehicle along a track where it could be damaged? Everyone had different opinions, but your author had already considered all aspects.

The workers saw the results of their labor. Some of the work was correct, some was not. There was both happiness and unhappiness. Then it all became part of the past. Those who know the value of the present moment must work swiftly in order to achieve something meaningful. Use the present to build a path to a better future. Because the lives of humans are so short, the time available for an individual to take action is not great.

During June 1972 the monks and novices from Wat Rasadara Charoen joined in building the road beginning at the parking area. That section of the road had many large stones, some so big it took 5 or 6 people to move them. However, those large stones were turned into an asset by the monks and novices who laid them along the side of the roadway where it sloped down toward a stream. They helped move small stones, gravel and sand for use as fill to finish grading the elevation of the roadbed. We had a road six meters wide and 123

meters long. That initial stretch of road was more difficult to build than any of the remaining portions.

No matter how difficult a task, if you solve the root cause of a problem the work will be easier and you will be able to achieve your goal.

Early in July 1972 when the work had reached a stream, many people helped level the roadbed to a width of six meters for a distance of 8 meters. The monk Luang uncle Rob Angsutharo who stayed with Than Ajan Phra Samuha Wian Silasaro, the head abbot of Wat Mathurawararam in Mu 3, Tambon Ko Pha-ngan, came to observe the road construction. Your author had instructed, "build a road that will allow large vehicles to get to the Nam Tok Phaeng waterfall." When he had seen the portion of the road which had been completed already, he came back and sat down to talk. He asked,

"Are you really going to build a road that will allow motor vehicles to reach the Nam Tok Phaeng waterfall?"

"Yes, that's what I intend to do."

"I think that will be very difficult to do."

"It shouldn't be too difficult. Look, things you've called difficult we have already accomplished to a significant extent. We work one day, and the road advances by one day's worth of work. After many days, much of the work will have been completed. There is no need to be concerned about the difficulties; they will be overcome by perseverance and effort."

At the beginning of August 1972, villagers from Mu 1 brought equipment to help in building the road, intending to continue the work started the previous month. With many people helping, the road grew longer, but then the work was halted by a sloping stone outcrop, a section where building the road would be problematic. A person who saw it said it would be impossible to get through; a detour would

be necessary. The villagers dug up tree stumps, cleared stones and vegetation. Today, the intended length of road was achieved but not the desired width. I thought to myself that the road would achieve the appropriate dimensions shortly.

Several days later, the monks and novices increased the width to the desired standard and another section of road was completed just as I had anticipated. As to the sloping stone outcrop, "it's difficult. There is no way to detour around it. Even if there were an alternate alignment, it would be very difficult and not very attractive. There's no way to overcome this obstacle." Most of the people, including the monks and novices as well as the parishioners, felt that way.

They frequently asked your author, "How can you build a road across this stone outcrop?" Your author responded, "Don't get excited; we can get across for sure. I see a way to overcome this obstacle you all regard as an impassable barrier. I want you to bring large rocks and place them at the base of the outcrop. Then bring smaller rocks and pack them in between the large rocks. Pack soil tightly into the remaining crevices. You only have to do this for a distance of ten meters, building the roadbed up to a height of three meters and a width of six meters. Working together it won't take you very long."

During the building of the road across the sloping rock outcrop, your author usually supervised and worked on the project myself. A novice, Chanyuth Somwang, provided valuable muscle power. It took more than ten days to surmount that impediment.

In September 1972 villagers from Mu 2 and Mu 3 joined together, arranging a time to meet at the place where the road entered the Nam Tok Phaeng area. On the morning of the fourth of the month, many men and women of all ages came. Children played in the water and had fun swimming. After the young men and women had excavated dirt and collected rocks for a while, some of them went off to look at the mountain forest, the stream and the Nam Tok Phaeng waterfall while others continued diligently to assist with the work.

The final section of the road was easy and the remaining distance was short. At 13:25 the road was finished. Where the road crossed a stream at a narrow point a temporary bridge was built by laying down sufficient logs to allow motorcycles to drive to the Nam Tok Phaeng waterfall easily. After the road had been completed and before the people dispersed a heavy rain fell. The meager water flow of both the Nam Tok Phaeng Yai and the Nam Tok Phaeng Noi waterfalls became torrents, crashing to the ground below with a loud noise. Everyone endured the soaking in order to observe the astonishing beauty of the two waterfalls.

Everyone assisted with the road construction until the job was done because of their mutual trust and loyalty. The Than Nam Rak and the Nam Tok Phaeng waterfalls which had been dry became beautiful watercourses. The rain united the two waterfalls into a truly splendid aquatic network.

The road was completed on 4 September 1972, but there were still no bridges at two stream crossings, so it was not yet possible for large vehicles to drive to the Nam Tok Phaeng waterfall. Later, villagers cut coconut trees into four meter long logs and used them to build bridges sufficient for a large Jeep to cross. Later, your author built permanent wooden bridges. After that, all types of vehicles were able to drive safely to the "Nam Tok Phaeng forest Park."

And so the work was completed through cooperation, dedication and diligence.

Building the sala

On 12 January 1973, after the road and the bridges had been completed, I contacted Khun Suphat Srithongkul who owned a big Jeep he used for carrying construction material. Your author asked for his help in transporting the lumber to construct the sala at the Nam Tok Phaeng waterfall which had been stored at Wat Rasadara Charoen. Khun Suphat Srithongkul agreed to do the job that same day. This would be the first large Jeep carrying construction material to travel along the Nam Tok Phaeng waterfall road. The lumber was unloaded from the truck and stacked directly on the ground in the parking area without any supporting sleepers and was left uncovered because the wood was *mai tamsao* (*Ternstroemia gymnanthera*), a hardwood evergreen which is not bothered by termites and which is not affected by sunlight, rain, dew or seasonal changes in the weather.

At this point your author wishes to thank Khun Suphat Srithongkul for his assistance. He provided both the transportation and the services of his workers gratis.

The lumber for building the sala was left out in the sun and the rain, waiting for the day the carpenters would begin construction. Then one day Khun Chamroen Chongchitta came to visit and set the date for construction of the sala as 9 May 1973. Khun Chamroen Chongchitta erected the Thai-style sala following your author's plans. The roof was completed first, then monk and novice friends prepared the floor. The entire task was completed by the end of May. I asked Khun Chamroen Chongchitta about the cost of his labor, but again he refused to accept any payment.

Your author wishes to offer my commendation. If most people knew the value to society of a public heritage, they would be willing to help build, decorate, preserve and maintain that heritage to help it

last long as possible so it could continue to be of value to future generations.

When the "Nam Tok Phaeng" waterfall was first made accessible by the construction of the road, hordes of people came to visit as if it had been a fair. Month after month people streamed in to visit the Nam Tok Phaeng waterfall. Even a year later people were still coming to visit every day, some days more visitors, some days fewer.

The Nam Tok Phaeng waterfall has become one of the tourist attractions of Ko Pha-ngan District, Suratthani Province. People who visit Ko Pha-ngan should not miss the "Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park" recreation area.

Building the guesthouse

During 1974 whenever I had no religious duties at the temple I would invite the monks and novices to leave Wat Rasadara Charoen, sometimes in the late morning, sometimes after noon, to help fill in pits which had been dug and abandoned by earlier groups of tin miners. Your author wanted to make use of that area, so I decided to level the site, a process that took several days. I gathered up the construction tools and started the process. Some people walked in and saw what I was doing. When they learned why the pits were being filled, they usually asked why didn't I just choose a site that was already level rather than wasting time filling in holes. That location, just to the west of the parking area, was near a stream where trees provided cool, comfortable shade. That's why I had selected the site.

When the monks and novices had finished preparing the area I went to find Chan Saowalak, the mechanic who had helped fix a small Willys Jeep for your author. I asked the mechanic Chan to help transport the lumber from Wat Rasadara Charoen where it had been stacked up to the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park. The mechanic Chan

completed the task I asked of him. It was not surprising that the mechanic Chan Saowalak was willing to help carry the material as he had said to me earlier, "when this vehicle is repaired, I will maintain it for you and will take it as my duty to drive you wherever you need to go and transport whatever material you need moved. Whether far or near, I would like to volunteer to provide that service. Please don't be reluctant to accept my offer."

This is one more person whom your author would like to praise here.

Your author had the novice Chanyuth Somwang to help me carry the lumber for building the planned guesthouse. It took about half a month to complete the structure. Although it was a small guesthouse, it had a storeroom, one bedroom and a living room. It would be convenient for people who came to visit; they would be able to sit, sleep, and relax there during their leisure time.

A scent emanated from the forest, mixing with the mist drifting on the breeze and harmonizing well with the peacefulness of nature, providing relief from the heat and dispelling anxiety.



Building the weir



picture by
Chorn srithongkul

In April 1975, after the traditional Songkran festival and the water pouring ceremony to honor Luang Pho Phring and Luang Pho Phrom had ended, your author together with the novices Chanyuth, Somboon, Suphot as well as many monks departed the temple to go to the "Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park" to help collect stones from the stream near the guesthouse for use in building the weir. Those who had the strength or the spirit lifted the larger stones and placed them on the bank. During heavy rains those stones would help reduce

erosion. People with less physical strength brought smaller stones to pack in between the larger ones. The larger stones required two, three or more people working together to roll them over and lever them into place in a line by the weir to protect the stream bank. The work was going well, but then things slowed down when a deposit of tin ore was encountered. Tin was in demand as it commanded a good price: high quality ore was worth 100 baht a kilogram at that time. Novice Chanyuth used his hands to scoop up the ore and piled it on the stony bank, then he transferred it to a container. He brought many kilos of ore to mother Cheun Boonya who sold the ore in the market. Then Nang Job Thongnual, Nai Phong Phromacharoen and Nang Cheum Phromacharoen asked permission to mine the ore, verbally agreeing in return to help lay stones along the banks of the stream where it had not yet been done and to dig out the reservoir. It was decided that they would manage the extraction of the ore.

The 24th of July 1975 was Wan Khao Phansa. Novice Chanyuth, having decided to spend the three months of Phansa at the "Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park," departed Wat Rasadara Charoen on 30 July, before the beginning of Phansa, to clean up the guesthouse and to prepare the necessities required for the season. He decided to complete construction of the weir during this Phansa period.

I realize that people frequently play a role in changing nature. People who lack sufficient knowledge and just try to use raw power to achieve their desires may well fail. Then nature will punish them rather than reward them. We should be very cautious in our actions.

Only a short time after the Phansa prayer season had passed, your author along with novice Chanyuth worked to dredge out the reservoir, clearing out the sand and gravel which had washed down and picking up the remaining rocks. The site where the eight meter wide weir would be built was ready for construction. The equipment, tools and construction materials were ready. Stones to prevent erosion had been arranged on both banks by the monks and novices who had

spent the Phansa period at Wat Rasadara Charoen. The individual who had asked to mine the tin ore and who had agreed to lay the stones for the weir had been assisting the construction effort from the time they started the mining activities. Everyone had given their best effort.

Engaging in a labor of love and being satisfied with our work can make us feel free, happy and devoid of tension.

On 9 August 1975 with novice Chanyuth I began building the weir shortly after noon. Sand, gravel and cement were soon mixed and ready to pour into the prepared ditch. At the same time, the gate to flush out sediment trapped behind the weir was set in place. Then water in the stream was allowed to rush in, passing through the open sediment gate. A key challenge had been resolved. We finished filling in around the sediment gate and cemented it in behind the connecting pipe. The next day we were able to put rocks in place without difficulty; we didn't have to worry about the water in the stream. The weir was eight meters long, two meters wide at the base and two meters high.

Your author received good cooperation from the monks and novices throughout the process. They helped to complete much of the construction. Although the entire project was not yet finished, the results of the efforts during that Phansa season could be clearly seen.

So the cement in the weir would harden fully, it was allowed to cure for about fifteen days. Then the sediment gate and the watergate were closed. It took many hours for the water to fill the reservoir and overflow the weir because there was little water flowing in the stream. We closed the watergate for three to four minutes, then opened it and let the water flow for one minute. This routine was continued until the reservoir was full and the water overflowed the weir. Then the watergate was permanently closed, allowing the water to flow over the weir uninterrupted. If the

watergate had been closed for an extended period while the reservoir was filling, the stream below the weir would have run dry which would have impacted negatively on the aquatic animals.

The news that the reservoir was full spread rapidly. Children, young men and women and even old people came to see the weir and to bathe. Children swam naked, their clothes piled up on the bank, jumping into the reservoir and having a good time. There was no danger because the water wasn't deep. They could assist each other if anyone had difficulties.

Your author saw people of both sexes and all ages come to the "Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park." I felt fulfilled at having established the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park for the general public. I may be biased, but my heart is pure.

Declining villager respect

During September, October and the first half of November of 1975 because there was no rain for a long period many streams had insufficient water, especially the Than Nam Rak. It was such a dry year that both the Nam Tok Phaeng waterfalls stopped flowing; all that could be seen were the stone outcrops. In the stream below the weir there were periods when there was not enough water. The aquatic animals disappeared. It was very sad to see, but nothing could be done. Small fish and shrimp died, rotted and dried up on the sand. Kingfishers caught fish and shrimps in the ponds. Reptiles such as lizards hungrily sought the food. During a drought like this when streams are short of water nothing but rain can ease the crisis.

The water didn't flow over the top of the weir as it had before, but there was still enough remaining for the children to bathe. The drought that year caused streams in lowland areas which had never

before been short of water to run dry. Your author was harshly criticized, "It was wrong to build the weir because it takes unfair advantage of the general community. You are only concerned about your own benefit, building a weir to retain water for your own personal use. You ignore the difficulties that the weir creates for others. We can't plant our rice paddies; our livestock have no water to drink; people have no water for bathing." Some of the people wanted to retaliate, saying that the water retained by the weir should all be released so it could be used. Some people advocated destroying the weir as a means of ending the problem.

One day I invited the novice Chanyuth to Wat Rasadara Charoen for an activity. When that was done he returned to Than Nam Rak to find only sand the reservoir because both the watergate and the sediment gate had been opened, releasing all the water! It was good that the weir had not been destroyed. Oh, . . . you children. There had been less than 50 cubic meters of water in the reservoir. The water released from the weir didn't even reach the lowland areas. It all soaked into the sand and soil of the dry streambeds along the way.

This is a case of misunderstanding. Any time people act based on a misunderstanding, it can result in disaster. It is necessary to understand something before taking action.

During that hot season the weir had been a gathering place for children and adults who regularly came there to bathe. When they found the weir had no water for bathing, they went back. No one knows what they were thinking. They might not have understood that it's not a matter of who gets the benefits. Rather, it's a matter of a drought period. In any event, your author was blamed, berated, and rudely criticized. The respect and trust people had had in me diminished. They turned their faces away from me in revulsion. Such a show of ill feeling is seldom seen, but I was able to observe it in full measure.

Toward the end of November 1975 the northeast monsoon storms began to bring rain. Water surged down to the lowland areas, flooding and destroying some of the crops. Your author was then criticized for releasing water from the weir to take revenge on the villagers.

You should learn about natural conditions, the weather in the different seasons. Oh, well . . .

Banning tree cutting in the Khao Mai Ngam forest

Speaking of mountains or "*khao*" in the local dialect, Khao Mai Ngam is one mountain in the area with an abundance of different tree species, located in Mu 2, Tambon Ko Pha-ngan, Ko Pha-ngan Branch District, Suratthani Province. The mountain is 498 meters above sea level, one of the most stunning mountains in the south. If you draw a line from Thanui mountain in the north (another outstanding mountain) on past the mountain in front of Wat Mathrawararam you will come to Khao Mai Ngam. When Ko Pha-ngan people refer to "Khao Mai Ngam" everyone understands what is meant, but outsiders visiting the area probably don't. Anyone who wants to know which mountain is "Khao Mai Ngam" should go to the Ko Pha-ngan Branch District office or stand in the main street in front in front of that office. The massive, tall mountain which appears to block the road to the north is "Khao Ra," 627 meters above sea level. Note it carefully. When you face east, the mountain peak on your left which appears to be connected to Khao Ra is Khao Tha Nui which stands 452 meters above sea level. The next peak over is Khao Na Wat, 453 meters tall. The peak after that is Khao Mai Ngam. In order to identify Khao Mai Ngam, you must first locate Khao Ra, Khao Tha Nui and Khao Na Wat, all of which are in the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park.

In my youth I used to search for forest products with uncle Wat Chotichuang. He was a local hunter skilled in finding forest products, especially on Khao Mai Ngam. The mountain's name, which translates as "beautiful forest," was well deserved as the trees were handsome with round, tall trunks. Each of the different tree species such as *mai yang* (*Dipeterocarpus* spp.), *mai chik* (*Barringtonia spicata*), *mai mangtan* (*Schima wallichii*), *mai sak hin* (similar to teak), *mai tanghon* (a medium sized tree used for framing huts), *mai krathon mu* (*Mitragyna speciosa*), etc., were tall but not twisted or bent. They had few branches, mostly near the tops of the trees. Each of these species seemed to want to show off its distinctive features. Vines entwined around some of the trees, occasionally extending between two or three trees, swayed gently to and fro in the breeze. Forest animals like monkeys and langurs could be seen from time to time. When they saw a human, they would leap from tree to tree, making a loud squawking call. The sound made your hair stand on end.

Someone who has truly experienced nature can change their way of thinking more easily than someone who has never had such an encounter.

After your author had surveyed the mountain forest which is the watershed of the "Than Nam Rak" stream and which is known for the "Nam Tok Phaeng Yai" waterfall, I took the opportunity to survey Khao Mai Ngam mountain, the watershed of the "Than Nam Khang Phlu" stream which is noted for the "Nam Tok Phaeng Noi" waterfall. When I went back later for another look, I was very disappointed because the forest I had seen before had been cut down. It had become a thicket of small trees with grasses like *ya chon* (*Peristrophe acuminata*), *ya kha* (Imperata grass – *Imperata cylindrica*), *ya khom bang* (sedges) and thorny vines had growing up among the young trees. Your author waded through the grass thicket with difficulty. I had to watch out for sharp thorns and blades of grass that could cut.

Even though I was careful, my hands and feet were lacerated and blood oozed out. I was bitten by ants. I was itchy and hot by the time I made my way out. As I walked through the decimated forest I saw trees with a diameter of 3-4 inches that had been cut into meter long logs and stacked up in many piles. There were many pits for burning charcoal. Some of the pits had been opened and the charcoal packed in bags waiting to be transported out. The trees which had been cut into logs and stacked were the raw material for making charcoal. I went on up toward the top of Khao Mai Ngam which was not far from the charcoal pits. When I passed out of the decimated forest, I was closer to the top of Khao Mai Ngam. The forest and vines in that area were still in pristine condition. The forest was humid and the temperature relatively cool which helped cool me down and reduce my feeling of tiredness somewhat. My energy returned and I had enough strength to look around at the forest, the vines and the wildflowers. At last I reached the top of Khao Mai Ngam. Even though the summit was somewhat overgrown, I was able to see Ko Samui, the Ang Thong archipelago and get a view of the ocean on one side of Ko Pha-ngan.

People who enjoy the forest are content with the forest. People who enjoy something become attached to that thing. That is normal.

It was late in the day, so I went back down to the watershed area of the "Rong Khang Phlu" stream which winds around down the mountain and flows over the Phaeng cliff. That waterfall is known as "Nam Tok Phaeng Noi." The Rong Khang Phlu stream is about 2 kilometers long. From the headwaters of this stream all along its course the extensive forest, formerly abundant with trees, had been cut down so the land could be used to grow non-glutinous rice, glutinous rice and vegetables. After a period of time the land was abandoned leaving a degraded forest, not the extensive forest it once was. The area became overgrown with grass, a forest no one wanted.

When forest trees are not abundant, the water supply is also not abundant. If you want an abundant water supply, you have to protect the forest.

On 12 September 1975 just a few days after the opponents of the weir had released all the water, heavy rains fell, filling all the streams along their entire length so I closed the sediment gate and the water gate, filling the reservoir behind the weir. When the children learned that the reservoir was full again, they came to bathe and play in the water. Villagers brought their clothes to wash and to bathe. When I saw that, I felt content.

On 27 September 1975, by the time I had finished my morning duties half the day had passed. After noon I invited the novices Chanyuth Somwang and Chadok Phunperm to leave their residence and visit "Khao Mai Ngam" to see if the forest had been further degraded. If the forest were still being destroyed, I would seek a way to stop it as best I could, although I realized that I had no authority, unlike government officials who are responsible for protecting the forests. They can apprehend people who cut trees and warn, educate or punish them depending on the circumstances. However, when officials do not carry out their assigned duties, the result is the destruction of priceless national resources. Public resources become the personal property of a few individuals. That's the way it always goes. Therefore, it was necessary to help conserve and protect the forest as well as to reforest. I tried to interfere as little as possible both with government officials and with the people who were cutting down the forest.

Your author along with the two novices found continuing forest destruction visible everywhere as we walked to Khao Mai Ngam. Some areas had been clear-cut. There were many more charcoal burning pits. Trees had been cut and stacked up in numerous piles. The iniquity was flagrantly exhibited, as if offering a bold challenge, "If you think you can do anything about it, go ahead and try." The problem of the trees being cut for charcoal making needed

to be resolved quickly. If the problem could not be solved, or if it were allowed to go unsolved, the forest destruction would not cease and the wooded areas would continue to shrink. "Beautiful Forest Mountain" would be transformed into "Bald Mountain." Your author had no idea how to solve forestry officials' problem. The forestry officials are responsible for protecting the forest. They ought to solve the problem themselves.

"That is not acceptable. You must help. You can help." These words sound in my mind for an instant, then faded. What was that sound? Where had it come from? Did it come from . . . ? All right, I am glad to help. I took pen and paper from my shoulder bag and wrote a short, easily understood message. I had the novices Chanyuth and Chadok post copies of the message at the charcoal burning pits, at the wood piles and in areas where trees were being cut. The message read, "Do not cut the trees or destroy the forest to grow crops or to make charcoal any more." I wrote only that, and didn't sign my name. I didn't sign the message because the charcoal burners would know who had written it. When that was done, we went back to the Nam Tok Phaeng waterfall to wait and listen for news about the impact of our actions.

Turning the alms bowl upside down

On the morning of 2 October 1975, as he normally did every morning, the novice Chanyuth went out to receive alms. He would then bring the food donated by the parishioners back to his residence near the weir and share it with your author unless I was away on business. He performed his supporting duties very well, never having erred since being ordained and coming to this residence. During the entire period of his novitiate he had whole-heartedly put his full energy into helping build the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park; his name appears in nearly every chapter. This morning was no different. He

went out to receive alms as usual, but this time he returned with an empty alms bowl. He related to me with a sad countenance the comments of some of the people.

“Novice, this morning we have no charcoal to boil our rice, no firewood to cook our curry.’ That’s what the people said. I felt uncomfortable, so I hurried back.”

“That’s all right, novice. Today they cut us off. That’s better than having them cut down trees. The trees are still standing and the forest has not been destroyed because of our prohibition on tree cutting. Even though the villagers no longer respect us and don’t provide offerings when we go out to receive alms, we should be content. When we take a stand on something we must be willing to make some sacrifices; when we take a position that others don’t yet understand, we must be willing to accept the consequences. Our actions will benefit the common good and will benefit their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren – the direct blood relatives of the people who have cut us off today.”

“Ajan, this morning we have nothing to eat. We have no rice at all.”

“Don’t get excited, Novice. Go find mother Cheun Boonya and ask her to cook up some rice and a pot of curry. We’ll have enough, but you must bring the food here by yourself. Don’t allow her to trouble herself to bring the food. Whether she asks any questions or not, you should not tell her about what has happened and make her feel unhappy.”

The novice was preparing to dress and go out but had not yet left when mother Cheun Boonya, aunt Neuey Chotchuang, aunt Phin Srithongkul and aunt Klin Phulperm came to the residence with a

basket of rice and other things. When they came in, mother Cheun asked,

“Novice, have you had your morning meal yet?”

“Not yet,” he replied.

When mother Cheun and the three other women had put down the things they had brought, we listened to what they had to say. Their comments can be summarize as,

“You seem comfortable here. I haven’t been here since you built the weir. Yesterday, Cheun invited us to prepare food for you. That’s why we’re here now.”

Aunt Neuy said, “You’ve built a reservoir which is a pleasant place to bathe. The children say it’s fun to bathe here because there’s lots of water.”

Aunt Phin said, “Oh, because of the good supply of water the children suggested bringing clothing here to wash at Maha’s weir. There’s plenty of water and it’s very convenient.”

Aunt Klin spoke up, “Other places have little water. The other day when it rained, there was enough water for a while, but it’s getting dry again. This year we’re suffering from a drought, while other places are having floods.”

While they were talking, mother Cheun and the other three women prepared a place to sit, got the food ready and laid it out on a cloth. When everything was in order, they invited the novices to come to receive the offering of food. That day went well.

After that, the novices bought rice to store away as well as curry ingredients, vegetables and dried fish so we could prepare our

own food. Some days, mother Cheun brought food. Some other people who still respected us also continued to provide offerings of food on through the end of the Phansa period. Even after Phansa, some people still brought food offerings. Your author thinks that no one knows the story about how the novice Chanyuth went out to receive donations and returned with an empty alms bowl, neither the people who did donate food nor those who didn't. If they were to learned of it, what would be their reaction? Your author cannot guess. Whatever will happen, let it happen. When something will occur, it will occur. However,

When you receive benefits from something, you should do something constructive for that thing so others can continue to receive benefits from it.



Going to pay respects to Ajan

On 17 October 1975 after the daily meal had been completed, novice Chanyuth went to Wat Rasadara Charoen to get some food for us to prepare the next day. Your author left my residence to go to Wat Mathurawararam, the temple nearest the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park, a distance of about a kilometer. Thirteen minutes of walking brought me there. I went in to pay my respects to Than Ajan Phrasamuha Wian Silasaro, my religious teacher. When I was a newly ordained monk, he allowed me to live in the temple and taught me Buddhist philosophy. It had been a long time since I had visited him and we talked about many things which had transpired since then. Then Than Ajan Phrasamuha Wian spoke about something which was weighing heavily on his heart saying,

“The young people here don't come from different lands. They all live not far away, but they act very arrogantly. When I politely warned some children not to throw green santol fruit at the front of the kuti, they got angry. They knew a monk couldn't do anything to them, so they dragged up a coconut frond and pounded it on the porch steps below making a loud noise. Then they made threats! I've been living here a long time, but I have never experienced anything like that. They didn't know what is proper and what is not. It was very sad. And you, are you comfortable at the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park?”

“I am comfortable, Ajan.”

“I understand some people were very angry that you built a weir, collecting water in a reservoir and not releasing it, so they opened the watergate and released all the water. When we are angry, our judgment is impaired. We may not be able to see the truth. It's very sad. In fact, the amount of water flowing in the stream below the weir is the same as it was before the weir was built, no more and no

less. You can prove it by releasing all the water behind the weir then observing how much water there is in the stream. The water flow will be the same as it was when watergate was closed."

"That's exactly right. I explained that to some people, but they didn't believe me. They said I had changed the flow of the stream, causing the water to disappear and making them suffer losses. In fact, whatever quantity of water is flowing in the stream, that's the amount of water they receive."

"You have been patient for some time, and you will have to be patient a while longer. Goodness and truth will protect you and you will be praised when the time comes."

"Yes, Ajan."

I stayed talking to Than Ajan Samuha Wian for some time. Then it was time for me to return to my residence. What had happened at my residence? The reservoir behind the weir had been full of water before I went to visit Than Ajan Samuha Wian. When I returned, only sand and gravel remained. This was the second time. It was probably people wanting revenge saying, "Go up and release all the water behind the weir so we can have water to use." They had done it two times. I didn't know what they might do the next time, but never mind. . . . I didn't let it bother my mind because even Than Ajan Samuha Wian, who is a skilled practitioner of the Buddhist precepts and is respected and venerated by people far and near, still had been bothered by mischievous children. I was only a pupil of Than Ajan Samuha Wian. I had not been ordained very many years. The good deeds I had done were not yet understood and had not yet been accepted. Today a few people had exhibited boorish behavior. That's all right.

On 26 October 1975, five days after the end of Phansa, novice Somboon together with the monks who had spent the Phansa period at

Wat Rasadara Charoen added their efforts to the project to widen the road at the edge of the weir so the Jeep of the mechanic Chan Naowalak, who had volunteered to drive for me, could travel more easily when he transported monks, novices and necessities. Not only did the monks and novices use their energy to build the road along the edge of the weir, they also extended the road past the residence to the parking area near the Thai style sala as well.

The results of these efforts help remind visitors to the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park of the need for perseverance in the face of difficulties, a visible documentation of the cooperation of the people of Ko Pha-ngan in preserving their forest resources as a sustainable public heritage for the local area and the nation.

A proverb in the *Krathu* style of Thai poetry

Friends advise

Good friends	and bad friends	we all have.
Advice	is provided	but our actions vary.
Friends	can provide us	advice, but
Goodness	or evil	stems from our deeds.



Attractions of the virgin forest

On 30 March 1976, the construction work on the dream I had determined to implement and about which I had spoken to Khun Thonglo at the Nam Tok Phaeng Noi waterfall on 16 July 1967 (see the section "Thinking about the past") was complete in all respects. But your author's spirit was still attached to and wanted to be near the virgin forest, a forest that had never been destroyed, a forest with many big trees of different species, a truly luxuriant forest. Your author invites those of you who love the forest and who have a feeling for the forest to go experience it. Those of you who love to study nature should go conduct your research there. Those who love to visit interesting forests should come to visit. Those who want to pitch a tent in the middle of the forest to experience the fragrance of nature should do so. The forest is a field of science which should be studied. Anyone who really wants to learn about botany should get close to a real forest. If interesting information is discovered, it should be publicized so it can be used to help protect the forests. Then new generations of forest lovers will have an opportunity to study there in the future.

I wanted to be near the virgin forest so I could take care of the forest and protect it from further destruction. There are those who desire land and the forest has much land. They want trees to cut down for lumber for their own use, for sale. They want a job processing timber so they can eking out a living. But the greatest evil is the destruction of tens or hundreds of rai of forest and burning the land to clear an area for agriculture, growing vegetables, taro and tapioca for a short period of time then abandoning the land, leaving behind the kind of degraded forest that can be seen everywhere. The new trees that grow up are mostly stunted. That is what newly regenerated forests are like. That is why it was necessary for me to be near the virgin forest as soon as possible.

Those who know how to work well are able to manage their time appropriately. They do quickly what is urgent; they postpone what is not urgent. That's what makes them effective and efficient workers.

Your author was aware and understood that I did not have the responsibility nor had I been assigned to protect and take care of the forest like a paid government forestry official. I realized it is usually not appropriate to interfere with someone else's work, but I thought under the circumstances it was appropriate. That is why I decided to do get involved.

Even though I had already been rudely cursed, been laughed at and been the object of other unpleasant behavior, even though I knew that more of the same would result, I had to accept it. I had to accept being cursed. I had to accept being laughed at by relatives, friends and some of my pupils in order to maintain the forest, to protect the forest so it could continue to be a part of Ko Pha-ngan. I had the strong dedication of someone who has no official authority, only the responsibility which comes with being a member of the human race.

Any day in which we do a good deed is an auspicious and fortunate day. I left my residence alone shortly after noon. I walked up along the Than Nam Rak stream, passing the Nam Tok Phaeng Yai waterfall, the Nam Tok Khan Bandai waterfall and the Nam Tok So Pha waterfall which merge near the Wang Nam Rak pond. I climbed up the steep rocky cliff, past the rock quarry, the Lan Klin Ahan terrace and the Nam Tok Phraek waterfall until I came to the virgin forest. Close by the virgin forest there was a rejuvenating forest with short, stunted trees. Some thin, stunted trees of different sizes had been knocked over and were lying horizontally along the ground like vines. They were all trees with no economic value. The rain had eroded the soil, leaching out the nutrients and rendering the land unfit for agriculture. The people who had cut down the forest had deserted

the area. Some places were covered with different types of grasses; some were full of *thaw maw khao maw ling* vines (*Nepenthes ampullaria*). (Villagers call these vines "the hunter's branch.")

The area looked like a peninsula of land extending out from the large mountain ridge as it was bordered by streams on three sides. On one side was a dry streambed. On the second side was the Than Nam Rak stream which then made a bend, effectively creating another stream on the third side. I walked around, looking at the lay of the land as I was going to build a residence and I did not want it to conflict with the forest and stream restoration. It was important for me to remain near the virgin forest. Finally, I found an appropriate spot.

It was getting late. I should be returning to my residence. The sun was about to set. Nature was painting the landscape with new colors. The shapes of the clouds and the mist on the horizon mesmerized me. It would be difficult to find an artist who could compete. The magical show lasted only a few minutes, until the sun went below the horizon. I considered it of great value that I had been able to see the changes, the impermanent form and color, which had briefly materialized and then vanished.

Everything which is born follows the same cycle. Some things leave good and evil behind. Other things don't leave even a trace.

While the sun was in the process of changing the sky, a large flock of crows flew away from Ko Pha-ngan Island where food is abundant, headed for the Ang Thong archipelago where they would sleep. Some called out "caw, caw" as if reminding their friends "we are birds of a feather." A small black spot appeared in the distance moving toward Ko Pha-ngan Island which gradually resolved into a flocks of bats. "The crows fly out and the bats fly in."

These two different types of living creatures must feed at different times. That is a rule of survival. Your author returned safely to my residence at the edge of the weir a little after seven in the evening.



Planning to reforest

On 16 April 1976, the annual Songkran festival and the ceremony to pour water on the statues of former head abbots (Luang Pho Phring or Phra Khru Arunakitjakosala, the brother of the former head abbot of Wat Chaeng Ko Samui, and Luang Pho Phrom or Phra Khru Wibulathiparat, the younger brother of the former head abbot of Wat Rasadara Charoen Ko Pha-ngan) were completed successfully because their pupils, their relatives and the people who respected them cooperated in eulogizing the monks and in helping maintain traditions. Your author feels that planting trees to rehabilitate a forest is the same as revitalizing a nation. How can a nation prosper without forests or without traditions? Having forests abounding with many species is an indication of the prosperity of a nation. To flourish, a country must maintain its beautiful traditions.

On 16 April 1976, a date I have referred to previously, other activities occurred which are worth recording such as the *Sangkhakam* ceremony (prayers performed by a group of Buddhist monks) and the *Sangkhathan* ceremony (presentation of gifts or food to Buddhist monks). After those ceremonies, I went back by myself to my kuti at Wat Rasadara Charoen to develop a reforestation plan. Uncle Nguen Chaipiam came to see me. He greeted me with a wai, sat down on the long bench, then asked me for confirmation,

“Have some of the villagers treated you that badly?”

“Never mind, uncle. They only acted out their feelings toward me”

“I’ve thought about that. Parishioners should not act that way, giving offerings of food and other necessities only to other monks and giving nothing to you. What kind of merit making is that?”

"Today, uncle, you've seen with your own eyes the parishioners acting like that toward me. I have been invited to ceremonies but when it's time to make offerings, they present nothing to me, only to the other monks. They prepare no food for me, only for the other monks. The other monks offer to share their food with me, but I cannot bring myself to eat it. Sometimes I am invited to a funeral or an ordination. The host specifies the date and time when a vehicle will pick me up. I have waited in vain to be picked up many times. I have been fooled, I have been treated spitefully but I have vowed to follow the precepts so I must endure it. For people who follow the precepts, problems are a means of testing their spirit.

"Maha, be careful when you stay at the Nam Tok Phaeng waterfall, when you go through the forest and when you climb up the mountains. There could be fatal danger. There are many opportunities, especially during this period. People who dislike you, who are angry with you and want to take revenge and those who have lost benefits could surreptitiously put your life in danger. Don't be careless."

"I won't be careless, but what can I do?"

"Will you go back to the park today?"

"Yes, I will. I'm going to survey the area to develop a reforestation plan."

"That the villagers curse you, don't give you alms and don't invite you to ceremonies like ordinations, new house blessings and funerals is a result of your concern for the forest, your prohibition of forest clearing for crop production, your ban on cutting trees to make charcoal or even to build their own houses. Maha, please don't be too strict. Back off a little."

"It's not true that I have prohibited anyone cutting trees to build their own house. I have never been concerned about that."

"If you're going to replant the forest, you must be very careful. Watch out that you don't make trouble for the owners of the mountain land."

"In developing the reforestation plan I've selected many sites, but I will only plant trees in areas which have not been claimed by anyone."

"That's good. If you can operate like that, everything should be fine. But I'm still worried about you."

After talking for a while longer, he said good-bye and left. Your author could still visualize what had transpired. The conduct of the people and their curses grated on me and remained embedded in my heart, my eyes, my ears. I could see that the situation manifested much potential power, power to destroy equanimity and power to create suffering. It seemed to encourage me to respond in an improper way. Those feelings were hard to expunge, but I had to expel them as quickly as possible because they had become implanted in my spirit. They had to be actively excluded through the action of my own good thoughts.

When a war breaks out, one day there will again be peace. The fire that consumes the forest, the house and the city will sooner or later go out. In the case of the fire of revenge and hatred which burns the soul and destroys virtue, one day peace and tranquility will return if the individual is aware and uses righteousness to regain calm equanimity.

Novice Chanyuth seemed to be waiting for the right moment. After uncle Nguen had taken his leave, he came to see me and asked,

"Ajan, are you going to the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park today?"

"Yes. If you have anything you need to take with you, get it ready because Chan the mechanic will be along shortly to get us."

"All right."

Novice Chanyuth brought his equipment to the kuti. Not long after, Chan the mechanic drove up in his Jeep and stopped in front of the kuti. He got out of the vehicle and walked over to see me. He spoke to me like a man in a hurry with many things to do. He helped load the equipment into the vehicle, then, the minute novice Chanyuth had brought the additional equipment and loaded it onto the Jeep, Chan the mechanic abruptly departed for the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park.

When you have everything, including material goods and friends who praise you, you don't really know who your true friends are. When you are in difficulty and you suffer great adversity, you look around for the friends who used to welcome you with kind words and a smile but they have become like enemies and strangers. Friendship and respect depart when adversity arrives. This could be one of the basic laws of mankind.

Planting trees to restore the forest

My plan had been to first build a small kuti for resting and for storing equipment before starting to plant trees to restore the forest. But when I thought about it, I realized it would take many days to get the amount of wood I calculated would be needed for the structure, so I decided to start planting trees first. While planting the seedlings, I could look for timber to build the little kuti, cut it and store it away.

On 9 May 1976, the heat and humidity of the hot season persisted. The air was still; even the leaves had stopped quivering. The cicadas in the forest were quiet. The water in the Than Nam Rak stream which had flowed with a loud *saa saa* sound was silent. That meant that the quantity of water had declined significantly, but there was still enough for the shrimp and crabs to survive. Neither your author nor the novice Chanyuth were deterred by the heat and we continued to do our duty. When we were hot or thirsty, we could depend on the water from the Than Nam Rak stream for bathing and drinking. When our clothing became too ripe, we finally washed them in the water. Even though the quantity of water was small, the benefits it afforded were great.

Similarly, people who have received education, even though the quantity may be limited, can still be of great benefit to the world.

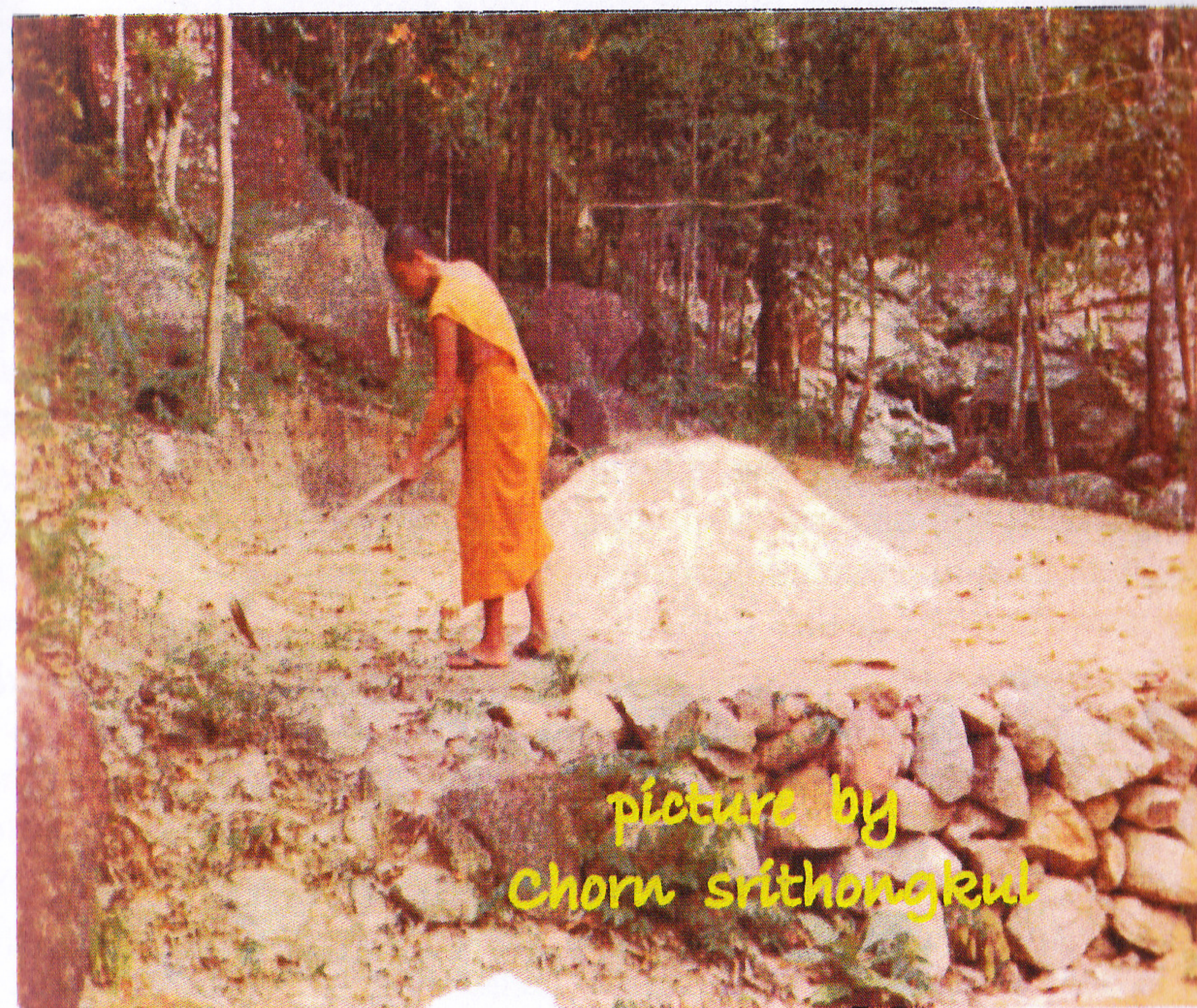
Your author and the novice Chanyuth after completing our morning meal left our residence and went to the mountain ridge at Than Nam Lod. We brought with us 100 tree seedlings to plant along the banks of the Than Nam Rak stream at the mountain ridge area of the virgin forest where we had surveyed for building the small kuti. We started digging holes for the *mai yang* seedlings (*Dipterocarpus* spp.) on the south bank of the Than Nam Rak stream, continuing toward the confluence with the Than Nam Lod stream on the west side of the mountain ridge. We had planned to plant *mai takhiang*

(*Shoria* spp.), but there had been a shortage of seedlings so we planted *mai yang* instead, spacing the trees widely. Later, when we could obtain *mai tiakhiang* seedlings we would be able to plant them between the other trees. On both sides of the Than Nam Duan, stream between the Than Nam Rak and the Than Nam Lod streams, we were going to plant *mai tamsao* trees (*Ternstroemia gymnanthera*). The plan was to reforest the entire area around the Than Nam Lod mountain ridge, but we had only a limited number of seedlings.

When we had a free day, your author and the novice Chanyuth worked to clear the area where we would build the small kuti on the site we had chosen on 30 April 1976 (see the section "The attractions of a virgin forest"), cutting the grass and burning it and grading the area. The site was on a rise, higher than the surrounding area. The ridge which extended out from the large mountain was close to the virgin forest and near the Than Nam Rak stream. At the same time, we selected the trees we wanted to stockpile for use in constructing the small kuti. When we had sufficient wood, we would begin construction to make it . . .

*. . . a place where we could shelter from the sun and the rain,
a place to relax and sleep when we were tired and weary.*

Building the small kuti



picture by
Chorn srithongkul

On 1 February 1977 I told the novice Chanyuth to bring food for our daily meal with him to the Khao Nam Lod ridge where we had prepared to build the small kuti near the virgin forest. That is known as "San Khao Nam Lod" ridge because water flows out from a crevice in the rock. That's why the villagers use that name. Your author followed the villagers' example and called the area "San Khao Nam Lod" ridge so everyone would understand to which location in the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park I was referring when I spoke of it.

Your author together with the novice Chanyuth brought the lumber that had been stacked up for building the small kuti and cut it to the appropriate length. We notched three pairs of beams. The building was 2.5 meters by 5 meters. We dug holes and raised the beams in pairs, then nailed planks onto the Thai style structure. We added a porch, which extended out two meters, as a multi-purpose area. The roof was thatched with nipa palm and coconut palm leaves. For the floor we used slats of *la own* (similar to the betel nut tree - *Areca catechu*). There was one bedroom. The rooms were divided by walls made from *mai rakam* (*Salacca wallichiana*). A second room was left vacant. There were two roll-up curtains made from *mai rakam* bark as protection from wind and mist. At last the small kuti was completed through the efforts and cooperation of my pupils, young monks and novices, who were willing to hike up to help and to bring with them the essentials for living in the forest.

Rain cannot enter a well-built house. Desire cannot dominate a well-trained soul. (Saying of the Buddha).

Returning water to the Than Nam Duan stream

The "Than Nam Duan" stream originates in a valley which divides the mountain ridge. The water flows around in the shape of an animal's hoof. It used to have plenty of water when many trees of all sizes including an abundance of vines and grasses covered the Than Nam Duan area. The water in the stream dried up when the forest was cut down and burned to clear the land for growing crops. The benefits were outweighed by the losses. One thing was gained, but many others were lost. Rice and vegetables were planted, then after a year or two, the land was abandoned. The farmers had no more interest in the area, but the bounteous natural forest had been lost. The water in the stream dried up. The fertility of the soil was gone, leached away by the rain. The forest animals that used to live in the area

disappeared. Different types of flowers and ferns such as *cho nang di* (tassel fern - *Lycopodium phlegmaria* Linn.) and many others which used to hang down from tree branches were extirpated. Things which depended on the forest or lived in the forest, the place of their birth, disappeared along with the trees.

Your author considered those changes in nature to be degradation caused by individuals. That is why I dedicated all my mental ability, all my physical strength and all my emotional spirit along with whatever additional assets I possessed to establishing the "Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park." I prepared a work plan of essential activities and implemented each one of them in an effort to bring water back to the Than Nam Duan. I was aware of the causes and the physical interrelationships, so I marked out an area and dug a pond, expanding an abandoned tin mine pit to eight meters on a side and two meters deep. The pond was near the small kuti at the narrowest part of the mountain ridge, between the Than Nam Rak and the Than Nam Duan streams. It was easy to divert water from the Than Nam Rak stream into the pond because there was already a channel built by the tin miners to direct water into an irrigation canal. To make the water flow into the pond as I desired, I merely had to connect a length of pipe to the existing canal system to divert the water instead of having it flow along the irrigation canal. I installed a valve in the pipe at the small kuti. I directed the water flow along the mountain ridge and installed valves at many locations in order to water the soil and keep it moist.

In a short time the Than Nam Duan stream, which had gone dry, was flowing again. Many kinds of trees whose leaves had turned yellow reverted to a lush green. The water source had been reborn, providing water for the birds and animals to drink. People who like to visit the forest and to gather forest products could make use of the stream when they got hot and thirsty. If they didn't want to get water directly from the Than Nam Duan, they could go a little further and

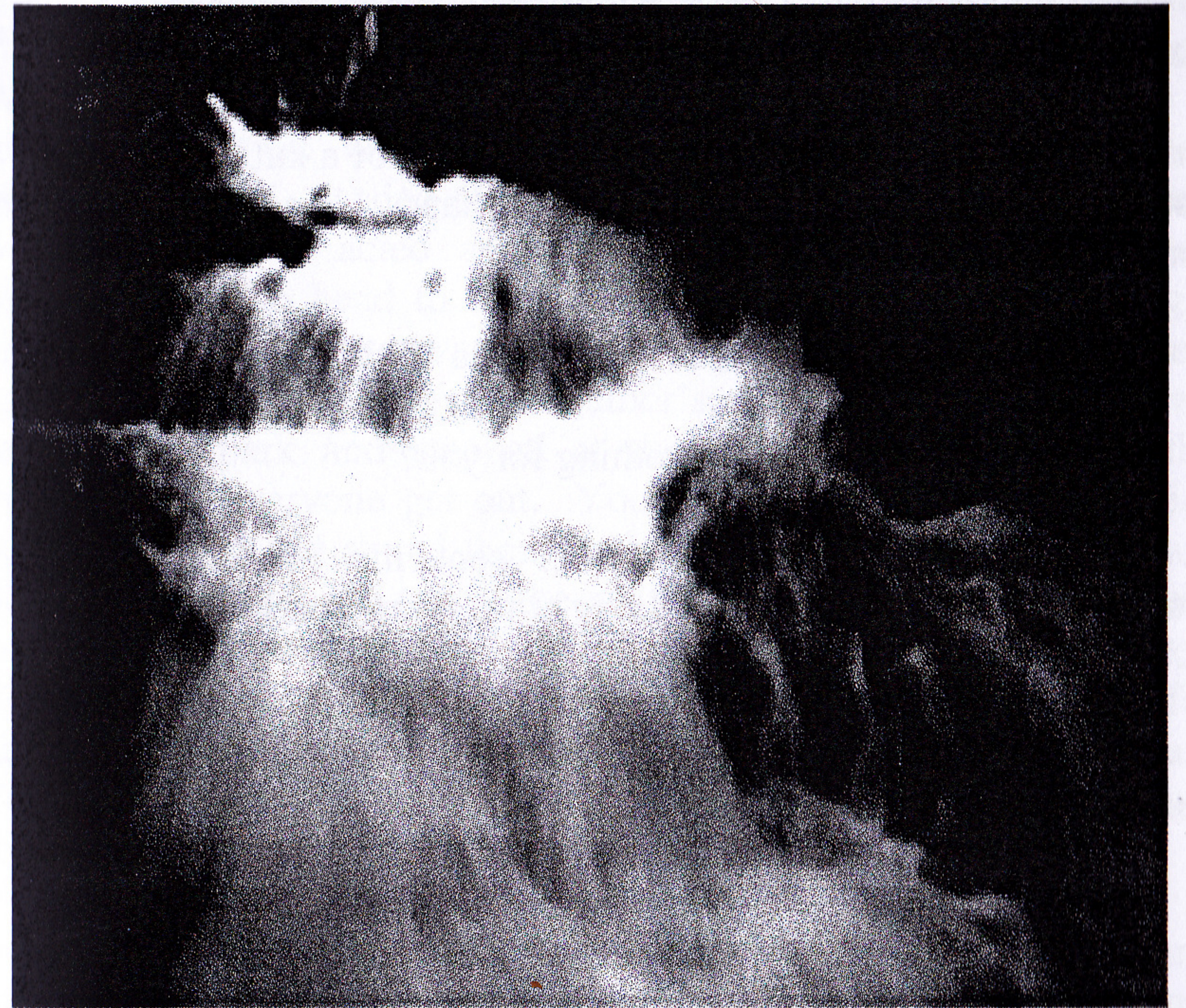
turn on a faucet to get a refreshing drink, wash their faces and rinse themselves off to dispel the heat.

Surveying the area for the guesthouse

The little kuti, although small and narrow, still provided an opportunity to welcome visiting monk friends from other provinces, affording them a place to stay and relax while they looked at the mountain forest. Laypeople who knew and respected me were the first to arrive, coming from other towns to visit. They were not offended at having to stay on the open porch.

On 20 May 1977 I decided that I would have to build a guesthouse for the convenience of people who come to visit so they could have a proper place to sleep. I surveyed the area looking for a suitable site and found a place that fulfilled my criteria at San Khao Than Nam Lod ridge near the virgin forest to the west of the small kuti. The Than Nam Duan stream flowed in between the two sites. The guest house would be built near the Than Nam Lod stream. Right at the spot where I would build the guesthouse there was a big *mai lon* tree (*Elaeocarpus floribundus*) with spreading branches full of leaves, a forest tree producing edible fruit. That was only tree like it in the area. Other than that, there were only a few small trees which had grown up in the midst of the Imperata grass. After I had selected the location to build the guest house, I still had to be ready. By that, I don't mean I had to wait for an auspicious time and day. Rather, I had to wait for the necessary resources: money, carpenters and building materials. As soon as those became available, construction would commence.

*Whenever we do good, that day and time is auspicious.
Whenever we do evil, that day and time is inauspicious.*



Coming of a National Parks Division official

On 9 October 1977 the weather was already quite cool. Your author and the novice Chanyuth left our residence at the edge of the weir and went to Wat Rasadara Charoen a little after five in the afternoon. When we entered the temple, in front of a kuti was a well-dressed stranger holding some papers in his hand. He came toward us and raised his hands in an wai of greeting.

"Excuse me, are you Than Ajan Maha Withun?"

"Yes, I am. Can I do something for you?"

"The National Parks Division sent me to look at the construction work you have been doing at the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park."

"There isn't enough time left to do it today. Can we go tomorrow?"

"That would be fine."

"OK. Tomorrow morning we can leave at about 8:30. I'd like to invite you to spend the night here. Is that agreeable to you?"

"That's fine. I'd be pleased to stay here with you."

Your author invited the National Parks Division official to a kuti and gave him the key. He put away his bag, took care of his personal needs, then came back to talk some more. After we had talked for a while he excused himself and went back to his room.

Your author sent word to my father, Chan Boonya, and his younger brother that an official of the National Parks Division would be going to look at the work on the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park. I also asked them to prepare food for a meal at the park.

Your author, together with the novice Chanyuth, the National Parks Division official, whose name I learned later was Somboon Wongphakdi, were ready when the mechanic Chan Saowalak came in his Jeep to take us. When all was in order, the mechanic Chan started out at 8:30 A.M. headed toward the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park with your author acted as tour guide. We started from Ban Maduawan. The bend to the left led to Ban Chaloklam. Straight ahead was Wat Mathurawararam. The right branch led to the forest park along the road built by your author's group. In one kilometer, we reached the park and stopped at the edge of the weir near the guesthouse. Everyone got out. Your author brought some supplies out of the Jeep and stored them in the guesthouse, then I took Khun Somboon Wongphakdi to see the weir, the circular road we had built and the Thai style sala. Khun Somboon stopped to talk to my father, Chan Boonya, and Nai Naeb Boonya who were sitting waiting for him. He excused himself from the group and went to look at the Nam Tok Phaeng Noi waterfall, then walked with the novice Chanyuth over to see the Nam Tok Phaeng Yai waterfall.

Your author stayed behind talking with my father, Chan, and my younger brother. When after a short while Khun Somboon came back to the sala, your author led the group on a short walk along the stream then on to Yod Dome to look at the view. After enjoying the vista for a while, we walked back down, heading east toward the San Khao Nam Lod ridge, passing through the Pa Ho Nang (Krachao Sida) forest and the Petchaheung forest to the Tan Nam Lod stream. When we reached the shade of the *mai lon* trees (*Elaeocarpus floribundus*), your author showed Khun Somboon the place where we had planned to build the guesthouse, but told him that we were not yet ready to start construction. We a walked a short distance past the

Than Nam Duan stream and arrived at the small kuti. Everyone sat down to take a break. When we were rested, we took Khun Somboon to see the pond which at the time was half full. Clean, clear water was gushing out of the pipe into the pond. We walked over to look at the pipe system with faucets installed at intervals to water the trees and to slow the rate of runoff from the mountain. Water would soak into the soil, then slowly percolate through the earth and find its way to the Than Nam Duan and Than Nam Rak streams.

We doubled back and sat down at the small kuti. I explained more about the path we had just walked from the weir to the San Khao Than Nam Lod ridge and the small kuti, a distance of just over one kilometer. Along the way we had passed a newly regenerating forest which would need special care. Giving special care to a regenerating forest is preferable to destroying whatever forest still exists then replanting new trees. At the mountain ridge where we were sitting I had planted many seedlings along the banks of the stream and I intended to seek additional seedlings to plant (Pointing out the area) "That virgin forest, which was created at the same time as Ko Pha-ngan island, has never been burned. The big trees have never been destroyed. There are many different tree species. The reason I built the small kuti right here is because I want to protect the virgin forest as a part of the national heritage. It is a public place where new generations who love the forest and want to study it can have a place to go to conduct their research."

Khun Somboon said, "I have observed that your work is technically correct. I'd be glad to help you with your plan to build a guest house. You can begin construction whenever you're ready."

When we had rested and chatted for a while, I led the group away from the small kuti and into the virgin forest to observe the profusion of trees. When we reached the forest, I informed Khun Somboon that this wooded area was called "Pa Than Nam Lod" by the villagers because the water flows out of the mountain mainly through

a jumble of rough, large rocks. The trees on the mountain ridge here are mostly *mai yang* (*Dipterocarpus* spp.), and *mai mangtan* (*Schima wallichii*). The middle size and small trees in the understory are mostly *mai nuan* (*Garcinia merguensis*).

Khun Somboon said, "At Ko Pha-ngan there are many big trees with trunks that are straight and tall, not crooked. What's important is that the big trees are not spaced far apart. I've established many forest parks and other parks, but none have had so many trees as this. There really are a lot of trees here. I'll tell my superiors about it and show them the photographs as well."

Our group walked along observing the trees, arriving at the Tha Sataw area just in time for our daily meal, so we ate there. That area is named for the many *sataw* trees (*Parkia speciosa*) along the banks of the stream. No one knows why those trees began growing there, but the *sataw* trees have become the symbol for which many features in the area are named: "Pa Tha Sataw" forest, "Tha Nam Sataw" port.

When the meal was over, we continued walking and looking at the trees and the forest until we arrived at San Muang Mak ridge. Khun Somboon saw a large *mangtan* tree (*Schima wallichii*) on the right side of the trail. We had arrived at the forest park. "Oh, ho. The trees grow that big, do they? I never thought the small island of Ko Pha-ngan would have trees as big as that." Khun Somboon brought out a tape to measure the circumference of the tree. It was over six meters. We hadn't walked on very far when we found another tree of the same species, bigger even than the previous one, on the left side of the San Khao Muang Mak ridge. The San Khao Muang Mak ridge has more trees than the San Khao Than Nam Lod ridge. Ahead, the left fork in the trail led to Muang Mak town; the right fork went to Muang Awk town. We looked at the trees along the trail to Muang Awk. Just before Muang Awk town there were the most trees of all. People who love forests, who love trees will find many species to observe. It seemed as if we had been captured by the magic spell of

the forest which caused us to linger a long time, our senses drinking in their fill of the opportunity to see a true forest.

When it finally came time, we went back to the small kuti to wash our faces and rinse off in order to get cool. We sat and rested. When we were cooler and had rested from our long walk, I brought the group to the residence at the edge of the weir. The walk didn't take long. We sat and talked about different things, then Khun Somboon Wongphakdi said,

"I want to establish the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park effective this very month (October). I will authorize you to hire nine workers. Ajan, you can find the workers yourself. When you have identified the people, send me their names. I will forward their wages to you."

I still didn't know if I had had a stroke of good fortune or just the opposite to have become a *de facto* staff member of the National Parks Division of the Royal Forest Department but without benefit of having my name registered on the rolls.

From the start of my efforts to establish the "Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park" I had overcome many obstacles in the course of in bringing my dream to fruition. I felt I ought to be able to handle the minor additional duties I had just been assigned and I was happy to do so.



Hiring workers

On 10 October 1977 after Khun Somboon Wongphakdi had said he would authorize nine workers, I didn't waste any time. The next day, 11 October 1977, I listed the people I wanted, people I could trust to carry out their duties because I had seen them work before. I asked those people to come to see me. When they had gathered together, I told them of my intentions. When they agreed to work on the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park, I entered their names and addresses in a ledger and told them to report for work the following day.

The first group of daily workers were:

1. Nai Wichitr Thongmak
2. Nai Somneuk Reuangchan
3. Nai Somphong Srithnongkul
4. Nai Amphol Sukphol
5. Nai Ouan Chotechuang
6. Nai Samreuang Chotechuang
7. Nai Prathip Chotechuang
8. Nai Saeri Chotechuang
9. Nai Lab (Sui) Chotechuang

When the nine workers met at the small kuti on the first day, I told them what work they would be doing. The nine would work together to grade the ground as soon as possible where the guest house would be built because the head of the new forest park would be coming. We didn't know who that person would be, where he would be coming from or when he would arrive. What we did know for sure was that the National Parks Division would send a superintendent and we wanted to be certain that he would have a comfortable place to stay.

On 13 October 1977, I held a discussion with the workers and came to a new agreement whereby they would divide into two teams. Five workers would be responsible for preparation of the area for the guest house. A plan showed the details, e.g., width 4.5 meters, length 12 meters. There would be two bedrooms, a kitchen, a bathroom and one living room. The roof would be covered with shingles of *chak* (nipa palm – *Nipa fruticans*). The graded area was wide and long enough to build the guest house and still include an open area for walking and a takraw ball court. When the land preparation was completed, the team obtained the building materials. Both teams worked together to construct the guesthouse which took about two months to finish.

All workers want their efforts to be successful and to achieve their intended goals. People who realize their goals are happy. People who fail to realize their goals are unhappy. This is a rule that all people understand well.

Making improvements to the forest

From 12 February 1978, after the guesthouse had been completed, the workers were more comfortable. When it rained, they had a place to go to stay dry; when the sun was hot, they had a place to find shade; when they were hungry, the guesthouse had rice and curry fixings; when they were thirsty, there was water available; when someone was sick, there was medicine on hand. When it was time to start work, they all left the guesthouse together to do their jobs. The task now was to improve the forest near the guest house and near the small kuti. The workers looked around to see where the forest needed attention and where planting additional seedlings were needed to replace missing trees. They tried to mark the boundary of the forest park clearly, although in some places the park overlapped some agricultural plots of people who had been there before the park was established. In those cases, they asked the people to restrict their agricultural activities to the area they had already cleared and not to cut any more trees.

Your author tried his best to be fair and to insure an understanding of the park so both sides could cooperate and so neither side would be put at a disadvantage. People who had been making a living in the area before the park was established could continue to do so as was their right, while people tasked with protecting the forest and nature could look after and preserve the forest as was their duty, maintaining it as a public heritage for Ko Pha-ngan in perpetuity.

Although I tried to work with care, the activities still impacted on the benefits of some people. That was the genesis of the danger which affected even me as some individuals still didn't understand (or pretended not to understand) the purpose of the park. Under those circumstances, it was necessary to continue to peacefully persevere.

From the beginning of the creation of the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park until the present time, some individuals and some groups have called me the “communist monk.” Some visitors when they saw the pond project to return water to the Than Nam Duan area (while it was still under construction) would say, “they are building a tunnel to store weapons” or “they are building an emergency disaster shelter.” They saw areas cleared of Imperata grass in preparation for replanting trees and said, “they are building a helicopter landing pad to deliver weapons and supplies. The boss ordered the work himself and provided workers and money because the boss trusts him.” Even though I explained, they still didn’t believe me. Some people claimed, “I have talked to the District Chief [of Pha-ngan District] about the people working here as day laborers in the forest park. The District Chief said he knew nothing about it.” Other people reported, “I have talked to the Provincial Forest Officer [of Suratthani Province]. He said he knows nothing about this situation.” When neither the District Chief nor the Provincial Forest Officer knew anything, who would believe me, who would accept my explanation?

Your author suggested to them that, “If you want to know the real facts about the laborers, you should ask Khun Somboon Wongphakdi at the National Parks Division of the Royal Forest Department at Bangkhen, Bangkok. He can give you the correct answer.”

Your author’s situation during that time was like a refugee who arrived at Ko Pha-ngan then committed a serious misdeed. Whichever way I looked, with the exception of my father, my mother and my younger siblings, all the villagers viewed me as an evil person to be reviled.



Phra samuvian selasaro

The heat reaches Ajan

The rumors, traveling from mouth to mouth, spreading from a small circle to an ever larger one, continued to expand until word reached Than Ajan Than Chao Khun Wisuthisophon, the head abbot of Wat Dusitaram in Bangkok Noi, Bangkok, that, "Phra Maha Withun Thamawaro, the former pupil of Chao Khun Wisuthisophon, who was invited to move from Wat Thongthamachat, Khlong San District, Bangkok, to Wat Rasadara Charoen in Tambon Ko Pha-ngan, Ko Pha-ngan District, Suratthani Province, has demonstrated his arrogance, prohibiting people from cutting trees to clear land for agriculture or to make charcoal as they had been doing for a long time." Ajan heard that I was greedy, that I was a communist and that I was a wicked monk with mental problems. Curses, evil spells, all kinds of things were mentioned, both to my face and behind my back. People no longer respected me. None of the people of Ko Pha-ngan invited me to be their spiritual teacher or to officiate at ordination ceremonies. Senior monks from Ko Samui had to be called on to attend every ceremony which involved Buddhist monks. The people didn't want Phra Maha Withun. The other monks still participated in ceremonies as usual. Sometimes I received invitations, too, for example, for an ordination ceremony or a funeral service. They would specify the time and date when they would come and pick me up. I can't count how many times I prepared to go, then sat and waited in vain. Sometimes in the temple where I was the head abbot, when there was a Sankhathan merit making ceremony for someone who had died, even though I sat with the other monks, no one would provide me food. All the other monks would be served by the host as usual. Than Ajan Wisuthisophon heard these words and it troubled him. He finally had to go visit his former pupil at Wat Rasadara Charoen on 15 May 1978.

Than Ajan Wisuthisophon said, "I am troubled, so I came to Ko Pha-ngan."

His former pupil asked, "What is it that is troubling you?"

Than Ajan Wisuthisophon replied, "I am troubled because of you. You should not interfere or get involved with the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park you have established. Can you do that?"

Former pupil, "Yes, I can. But not right now, not today."

Than Ajan Wisuthisophon, "When will you stop? Can you tell me that?"

Former pupil, "When I have completed the project I have laid out."

Than Ajan Wisuthisophon, "What project? Leave it alone. Don't get involved with the forest park at all."

Former pupil, "In fact, I have already made up my mind to stop interfering. The need for my involvement won't last very much longer. Then I will definitely stop."

Than Ajan Wisuthisophon, "Why is it necessary for you to meddle? The more you meddle, the more you get involved, the more things deteriorate and the more you will lose. No one puts food in your alms bowl. No one invites you to participate in ceremonies. No one wants you to officiate or to be a head abbot in the tambon. No one wants you to ordain their son. No one respects you. Do you know that?"

Former pupil, "Yes, I realize that."

Than Ajan Wisuthisophon, "If you know that, why do you obstinately continue to get involved with the 'Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park'?"

Former pupil, "Because my work is not yet finished."

Than Ajan Wisuthisophon, "I don't care if you are finished or not. I am asking you to stop now."

Former pupil, "Ajan, I understand that your motives are good, but I am fully determined to stop and not get involved when the time is right. You don't have to worry about me, Ajan. I will definitely cease my involvement then."

I felt sorry that I had to disappoint Than Ajan Wisuthisophon. He probably was not satisfied with the stubbornness of his former pupil. In my responses to him I had only requested time to complete the project before ending my involvement with the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park. If the replies of your former pupil did not satisfy you, your pupil respectfully requests the indulgence of his teacher. Please forgive your student.

How could I not be involved when the goal of establishing the "Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park" had not yet been achieved? The community still didn't understand the value and benefits the forest park provided. Some individuals never considered the important fact that all living animals in the world depend on nature. If nature were gone, it is unlikely that animals could remain. Nature is like that.

The instinct of love and of pity remains in the heart. When you see that the destruction of nature is about to result in a disaster that will affect everyone, you try to prevent it. Even though it had been ordained that I should be punished for establishing the "Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park" to the extent of "turning the bowl upside down" and not putting food in my alms bowl, pointing at me and excoriating me, I had to accept that. I had to be patient and persevere. I could wait until one day they understood that the "Nam Tok Phaeng

Forest Park" is an invaluable heritage of the people of Ko Pha-ngan that will provide them with great benefits.

Although by this time Khun Somboon Wongphakdi had come to officially opened the park, I still didn't know who the National Parks Division would send to take over the duties or when that person would arrive. Therefore, it was necessary for me to continue my involvement to avoid any adverse impact due to a lack of continuity.

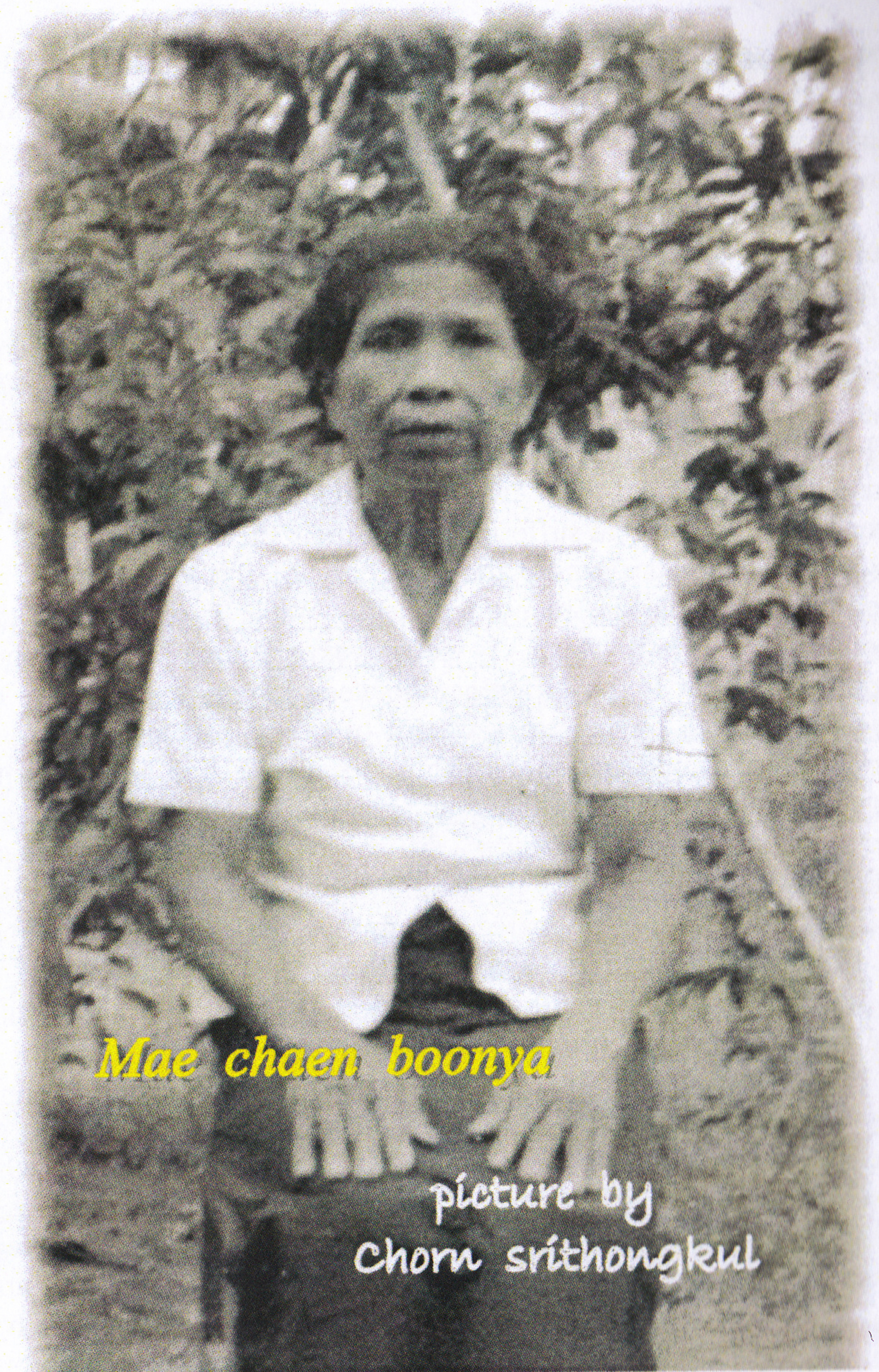
After noon, I learned that Than Ajan Wisuthisophon along with Khun Amphon and many villagers had gone to see the work on the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park so they could observe the situation directly. The first thing that Than Ajan Wisuthisophon saw was the major change in the condition of the area. In the past, Than Ajan Wisuthisophon had had to bushwhack his way through the forest or else follow a stream to get to the Nam Tok Phaeng waterfall. The route had been very difficult. But this time he was able to ride in a vehicle all the way to the Nam Tok Phaeng waterfall. There was a convenient place to turn the vehicle around and a parking area. There was a Thai style sala where he could sit and rest. There was water at the weir for him to bathe. There was a path along the bank of the stream for him to walk along and observe nature. There was a dome where he could look out at the vista. There was a walking trail through the forest. There was a guesthouse. There was a small kuti where he could sit. There was a pond which returned water to the Than Nam Duan stream. There was piped water available all along the San Khao Nam Lod ridge. The forest had been replanted. Your author thinks that Than Ajan Wisuthisophon must have seen all these things that had been done and thus would have understood well the reply of his former pupil. I think that he probably would have forgiven his pupil, at least to some extent.

When things are tough, when things are difficult, in times of emergency you understand more thoroughly and more clearly the nature of the spirit or morality you possess (or don't possess).

It was quite late. Your author was standing in the temple grounds when I saw Than Ajan Wisuthisophon's party returning to the temple from the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park. Khun Amphon greeted me with a wai while I was still some distance away. When I approached he said, "Oh, ho. You have done something of exceptional merit. I have observed all your work. There are few people who could have accomplished what you did. Please let me express my gratitude for your good deed."

Nai Phon Srithongkul walked up close to me and told me about Than Ajan Wisuthisophon's reaction to what he had seen. When he had turned on the spigot of the water pipe system to wash and cool off he had said to no one in particular, "My son, I wish you only happiness. I never thought you would be able to establish the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park so well."

The blessing of the master for his pupil, even if it was not spoken to my face but only related to me by Nai Phon, was like receiving a divine invocation. It helped buoy my spirit which had been full of sadness and suffering to regain tranquility and equanimity.



Mae chaen boonya

*picture by
Chorn srithongkul*

The suffering of my mother caused by her offspring

On 19 May 1977 I was returning from visiting Ajan Phra Somuha Wian Silasaro, the head abbot of Wat Mathurawararam, so I took the opportunity to visit my mother, Cheun Boonya, at her home, house number 10, Mu 3, Tambon Ko Pha-ngan, Ko Pha-ngan District, Suratthani Province. That is where I had lived with my father, my mother and my younger siblings from when I was a baby until I grew up. I had known warmth and happiness the whole time I was there because the kindness of those two people acted as a protective shield. I never learned about real suffering. I left their shelter when I went to study with Than Ajan, under the sanctuary of the yellow robe. I studied at many places, many temples. While I was under the mentorship of Than Ajan I never experienced any serious unhappiness. That is the difference between having to take care of yourself alone and having to take care of others as their leader. I experienced and understood hardship because I had to strive to improve the quality of life in the local area. I had determined that as a leader I must endure whatever difficulties and make whatever sacrifices were necessary for the common good in order to improve myself and those under my care: to improve the area where people lived, to improve education, to improve the environment. In pursuing those objectives, I followed an integrated strategy so that all aspects would be improved concurrently.

The community still didn't understand because the benefits of the activities were not yet visible. The reactions of the people who opposed the activities felt very cruel. Sometimes even though I was a member of the monkhood I came to the point of shedding tears because of my inability to free myself from love, from concern and from attachment. It was quite a long time before I regained my equanimity, but I had to extricate myself because at that time no one wanted me.

Although the results of an effort may not be immediately visible, they will gradually emerge. When that happens, the new understanding might help everyone understand better that they should face each other, should be good friends and good students and should respect and help each other.

When your author walked up to my mother's yard I found her sitting alone. She turned and saw me, inviting me into the house. She laid down a mat, then disappeared back into the house. I had not sat there long when she returned. She treated me with respect as a monk. My mother looked at my face, then her tears began to fall as she plaintively related to me,

"Your mother has never been unhappy, never been disappointed, never been pierced in the heart before now. Whenever I go I am cursed, I am called names. It is because of you, my son, that your mother has suffered great unhappiness. I am sad and disappointed and you are the cause. The villagers curse you so rudely that I can't stand to listen to it. I have to hurry away. Than Chao Khun Wan (Chao Khun Wisuthisophon) came to see you and forbid you to get involved with the forest park. How did you respond? I don't know yet. I am waiting for your answer. I think that when the people of Ko Pha-ngan cut you off, refuse to give you offerings even though you are a senior monk and the head monk in the tambon, when you are authorized to officiate at ceremonies yet no one is interested in you, it shows that they feel that you are not a true monk, that you are dishonest and that you are destroying the Buddhist religion. You should reevaluate yourself. It might be better for you to leave the monkhood and come live at home than to have the villagers curse you, saying that giving rice to a dog is better than giving it to you. Whenever I hear that it makes me cry. It torments my heart greatly."

Your author did not speak, did not say anything which would disturb my mother further. I left the house and walked back to the

temple. I had already been physically, mentally and emotionally battered enough by curses and painful provocations. When I saw my mother's tears and listened to her words, it was as if my body had been infused with a virulent poison. I was almost unable to maintain my mental stability or to control my feelings. Buddha help me! I still had some merit remaining. I was able to remember that even a monk determined to walk in the footsteps of the Buddha in reality is still attached to the world of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. How could I find the track of the Buddha's footsteps? I would try to maintain a balance between satisfaction and dissatisfaction. I would endeavor to act morally. I would use the goodness of morality to dry the tears of my mother and my father.

In 1978 the National Parks Division sent Khun Pricha Kradumchit to be the first superintendent of the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park, but Khun Pricha asked me to stay on a while longer and be his mentor until he could become familiar with the area and so we could discuss the projects which your author had planned. To assist the operation of the park, I agreed to Khun Pricha's request.

My former duties to assign work to the laborers were at an end. I didn't have to be responsible for any of the activities. I only had only to observe, listen and advise.

Khun Pricha Kradumchit was welcomed into the guesthouse which provided for his comfort. There was a bedroom, a working room, a kitchen, a bathroom and a living room. This guesthouse project had been completed specifically to receive the person assigned to be the superintendent of the "Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park."

Establishing the Nam Tok Phaeng Forest Park, the park of my dreams, required struggling with many obstacles, more than can be

recorded here. I have chosen some particularly meaningful instances for this historical documentation which might be of interest to others and which the next generation may find useful.

Your author has not been responsible for administering the work at the forest park since Khun Pricha Kradumchit became the superintendent. I only hope that from now on my "dream forest park," a natural heritage, a public treasure and the pride of the people of Ko Pha-ngan, will continue to be looked after and maintained as a thing of enduring value for mankind.

A proverb in the *Krathu* style of Thai poetry

Prohibiting love is difficult

Goodness	encompasses speech,	body and soul.
Loving	something	requires struggle.
Eschew	thinking ill	of others.
Poverty	should not diminish	morality.

Selected vocabulary

Ajan = teacher, mentor
Ban = village
Karunamaetta = kindness
Khao = mountain
Khun = Mr., Mrs., Miss (honorific title)
Ko = island
Kung = shrimp
Kuti = monk's residence
Lung = uncle (older brother of father or mother)
Luk = fruit (of a tree), offspring, child
Maha = title conferred on Buddhist priests completing the third grade
in Buddhist theology
Mai = tree, plant
Mu = a registered village
Na = uncle (younger brother or sister of mother)
Nai = Mr.
Nang = Mrs.
Nam = water
Nam tok = waterfall
Noi = small
Pa = forest
Pha = cliff
Phansa = Buddhist lent
Phi = older brother, older sister (honorific title)
Pla = fish
Phra khru = honorific title for a teaching monk
Rai = 1,600 square meters
Sadet = royal word for "to travel," e.g., "than sadet" = the stream
where the King traveled
Sala = open walled pavilion
San khao = mountain ridge

Takraw = game played with a hollow wicker ball
Tambon = sub-district (usually consisting of about 10 mu or villages)
Than, than pam = stream
Than = title of high respect
Ton, ton mai = tree
Wan khao Phansa = the first day of Buddhist lent
Wang = pond
Wat = temple
Ya = grass, weeds
Yai = large



